



## **Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Frequently Asked Questions MQ Renewal 2020**

### **What is the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority?**

Local citizens worked with the State Legislature to create the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority in 1993 to balance growth by preserving and restoring open space, natural areas, water resources and wildlife habitat and providing nature-based outdoor recreation. It is governed by a 7-member elected Board and serves the majority of the unincorporated area of the County and the cities of San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara, Campbell and Morgan Hill.

### **How is the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority funded?**

Funding for the Open Space Authority comes from two main sources:

1. A benefit assessment of \$12 on certain properties within the district's boundaries. Created in 1996, this assessment provides approximately \$4 million in revenue per year, and
2. In 2014, voters approved Measure Q, a \$24 parcel tax for 15 years, generating approximately \$8M in revenue per year.

### **What is the Authority placing on the November 2020 ballot?**

The Authority is placing on the November 2020 ballot a renewal of the Measure Q \$24 annual parcel tax with no increase. This tax would continue until ended by voters.

### **Why is the Authority renewing Measure Q, the Open Space, Wildlife Habitat, Clean Water, and Increased Public Access Measure?**

The cost of operation and maintenance is consuming a larger percentage of the Authority's revenues of approximately \$12 million annually. The increased cost of operation and maintenance is due to the success of the Authority's acquisition program, which requires more land management, and increased visitation to preserves by the public. Of this amount, \$8M is from 2014 Measure Q which is set to expire in 2029.

The Authority has an increased need for dedicated funding to support ongoing operations, maintenance, and natural resources stewardship on its growing system of open space lands. As of 2014, the Authority was responsible for managing 16,000 acres of protected open space. That acreage has increased to over 26,000 acres today. For example, the Authority has made a significant capital and management commitment to the public and its partners to complete the preservation, restoration and opening of Coyote Valley.



With increasing visitation to the Authority's open preserves (325,000 in 2019 and 600,000 during COVID-19) there is growing demand for public access to Authority open space preserves and trails. This will require greater investment in public access improvements and staff to maintain preserves and trails and continue the Authority's essential services to the public.

Having a dedicated funding stream to serve as the local match is essential to continuing to attract public and private grants.

The Authority Board believes that consistency of funding is necessary to continue the Authority's commitment to keeping open space preserves accessible to all, for the significant public benefit they bring. The Authority is stewarding protected lands in perpetuity and funding is needed with that "forever" commitment.

### **What will the Authority be able to accomplish if the measure is successful?**

The Authority plans to continue its commitment to:

- Protect scenic hillsides, open spaces, wildlife, redwood forests, and farmland
- Increase public access to open space and help maintain Authority parks and trails
- Protect important water resources including creeks, rivers, and streams
- Create new urban open spaces and environmental education programs
  - Up to 25% of the funding from Measure Q will continue to be applied to the Urban Grant Program
- Just a few of our priority projects as examples (More example projects are listed in the Expenditure Plan):
  - We intend to realize the vision for a protected Coyote Valley with a world class preserve system that serves the community in myriad ways
  - Open new open space preserves to the public, such as
    - Opening a new staging area at Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve
    - Expanding access at Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve

### **Measure Q does not expire until 2029 – why are you going back to the voters now?**

Since the passage of Measure Q, the Authority has nearly doubled the number of acres protected on behalf of the public. Visitation to open space preserves is at an all-time high. Costs of operation and maintenance of our preserves, including opening of new lands to the public, is therefore consuming a larger proportion of the Authority's revenues, with no built-in mechanism to increase revenues to keep pace with rising costs. In order to plan for the future expansion of the services the Authority provides to



the community through operation of its preserve network, the Authority needs to know whether ongoing funding will be secure after 2029.

### **Why remove the sunset?**

The Authority intends to steward its preserve lands, and keep them open to the public, in perpetuity. The Authority Board believes that a reliable long-term funding source that matches this ongoing need is important.

### **How was Measure Q funding spent over the last 5 years?**

Key accomplishments of the Authority include:

- Since the passage of Measure Q in 2014, the Authority has nearly doubled the amount of protected acreage to over 26,000 acres of open space, natural areas, water resources and wildlife habitat. The Authority expects to increase the acreage it is responsible for managing to over 30,000 acres within the next several years.
- The Authority provides over 20 miles of walking, hiking and biking trails open 365/7 with visitation increasing to over 300,000 residents annually stretching to more than 600,000 during the COVID-19 shutdown. The Authority projects it will add 30 more miles of trails in the next decade.
- The Authority partnered with the City of San Jose and the Peninsula Open Space Trust in 2019 to complete a landmark conservation acquisition of almost 1,000 acres in the North Coyote Valley to protect wildlife connectivity and water quality and reduce the risk of flooding to downstream communities
- The Authority partnered with Santa Clara County to complete the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan, a blueprint for preventing the conversion of agricultural land to development as a climate change mitigation strategy and is actively preserving farmland to implement the Plan. The Authority has funded over 30 projects and programs with \$2.8M of Measure Q investment in the cities of San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara, Campbell, and Morgan Hill to provide urban parks, public access, community gardens, and environmental education to connect people with nature. This increases the Authority's overall investment in urban open space to over \$11M.
- Check out the Authority's Measure Q 5 Year Impact Report to the Community <https://arcg.is/1bqOv5> to learn more about our accomplishments since voters passed Measure Q in 2014.

### **How can we trust the money will be spent as promised?**

The Authority has a proven track record of putting public funds into projects and programs that benefit the community. The Authority also has been able to leverage its local Measure Q funds by a factor of at least 3:1, receiving funding from partners and external grants.



In addition, the appropriate application of funds has been confirmed through careful analysis of our audits by an independent Measure Q Expenditure Oversight Committee. Independent oversight of our audits will continue with passage of the new measure.

### **What is the Authority doing to make access to parks and open space more equitable?**

Equitable access to nature is extremely important to the Authority. In 2015, the agency published its [Understanding our Community](#) report that identifies Deep Engagement Communities within its jurisdiction where certain populations experience greater barriers to access of parks and open space. This has allowed the Authority to focus its urban investments on those areas that have the greatest need, such as through its Urban Grant Program, funded by Measure Q, as well as providing environmental education programs alongside community partners. The Authority is also exploring provision of more equitable access to the North Coyote Valley Conservation Area, such as through a partnership with the Valley Transportation Authority, as it embarks on its landmark master planning project for that newly protected region.

### **How many people visit the Authority's preserves?**

There is increasing visitation to Authority open space preserves – now at approx. 325,000 annually. This requires significant investment in public access improvements, costs for master planning and staff to care for preserves and provide a safe and enjoyable experience for the public.

### **How much has the Authority spent on urban projects?**

As of July 2020, the Authority has granted over \$2.8M in Measure Q funds for more than 30 different urban projects and programs. Check out our Measure Q 5 Year Impact Report to the Community <https://arcg.is/1bqOv5f> for more information.

In total, the Authority has invested over \$11M in funds for Urban Open Space projects and programs.

### **How many people have benefitted from the Authority's educational programs and Authority-funded urban projects and programs?**

Over the last five years, the Authority has provided over 835 environmental education programs to connect more than 21,000 people in our community to nature.

In 2019 alone, over 8,000 members of our communities were connected to nature through Authority grant-funded urban programs and projects.



### **Who are some of the Authority's key partners?**

The Authority partners with hundreds of organizations and agencies to fulfill its mission. Examples of close partners include Peninsula Open Space Trust, the City of San Jose, the City of Morgan Hill, other cities in our jurisdiction, the County of Santa Clara, and the Valley Habitat Agency.

### **How does the Authority Operate?**

The Authority works to protect and manage open space and natural resources for the health and recreational enjoyment of Santa Clara County residents. The Open Space Authority is a unique public agency created to balance growth by protecting and stewarding natural areas such as streams, forests, scenic ridgelines, and wildlife habitat. With public funding, the Authority acquires open space, natural resource, and agricultural lands to protect them from development to support local farming, biodiversity, and wildlife populations and the quality of life for County residents. The Authority operates a system of open space preserves that are open 365 days of the year from sunrise to sunset and are free to the public.

### **How does the Authority use its funding?**

The Open Space Authority annually receives approximately \$12 million in revenue from two primary sources: a \$12 per parcel benefit assessment which generates about \$4 million per year, and Measure Q, a \$24 per parcel tax which generates about \$8 million per year.

Measure Q includes independent citizen oversight (including annual accountability reports to the community) of money generated through the funding measure to ensure that funds are spent as promised.

The Authority has successfully used these two public funding sources to leverage millions of dollars in additional public and private funding to complete open space projects across the region.

Since its creation in 1993, the Authority has been a pay as you go agency, has no accumulated debt and has been able to efficiently leverage its modest revenue streams to attract significant public and private grants.

For every \$1 of Authority funds, \$3 are secured from public and private grants to protect open space and wildlife habitat, restore natural areas and providing public access and environmental education opportunities.



## **How can I be assured that my tax dollars will be wisely and judiciously used?**

The Open Space Authority has a strong track record of efficient operations and spending, including significantly leveraging its funding to attract millions of dollars of public and private grant funding for land acquisition and capital projects. For every \$1 of Measure Q funds spent, the Authority raises \$3 from public and private grants. Revenue generated from a renewed and extended parcel tax will continue to be prioritized for spending on specific open space projects in and around San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara, Campbell and Morgan Hill, effectively managing and stewarding open space lands to protect water resources and wildlife and prevent wildfires. The Authority also will continue to allocate up to 25 percent of the funds to be spent within cities on urban parks, community gardens, restoration projects and environmental education that improve the quality of life. These funds cannot be taken away by the state or repurposed for other uses. Citizen oversight will ensure that funds are spent as promised. Citizen oversight continues to ensure that funds are spent as promised.

## **Why Protect Open Space?**

In creating the Authority, the Legislature found that preserving open space in Santa Clara County is an immediate high priority “needed to counter the continuing and serious conversion of these lands to urban uses, to preserve the quality of life in the county, and to encourage agricultural activities.” To ensure the most strategic and effective use of its limited funding, the Authority has completed a Strategic Plan, the *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*, which identifies the most critical remaining open space and natural resources for protection and stewardship in Santa Clara County including:

- **Water Resources:** Protect open space lands near rivers, lakes, and streams as a key water conservation strategy that will reduce the likelihood of water flooding downstream communities, improve water quality for Santa Clara Valley residents, and protect groundwater aquifer and recharge areas that are susceptible to contamination. Demand for water is expected to exceed supply by 2035 in our area unless we significantly increase our conservation efforts and the reliability of our local water supply.
- **Trails:** Create more trails and public access to ensure that we have safe, well-managed natural areas to go outside, walk, bike, and enjoy the beauty of our communities. Priorities include new park, open space, and trail projects in each of the 5 cities and closing gaps in the Bay Area Ridge Trail and San Francisco Bay Trail.
- **Farms and ranches:** Prioritize protection of local farm and ranch lands especially in the southern part of the County, all of which will help sustain the economic viability of agriculture and protect our locally grown food sources. The County has already lost 45 percent of its best farmland to development in the last 30 years. The Open Space Authority works closely with farmers to protect agricultural land from development while helping farms remain economically viable.
- **Wildlife habitat:** Preserve and restore habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species and their habitats, including acquiring land and enrolling it in the Valley Habitat



Plan Reserve System. Protecting large connected landscapes provide pathways for wildlife to avoid deadly barriers like fencing and roadways.

For more information on the mission and priorities of the Open Space Authority, please visit us at [www.openspaceauthority.org/2020renewal](http://www.openspaceauthority.org/2020renewal) or call us at 408.224.7476.