DATE: March 3, 2021

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT
ADOPT THE UPDATED PURCHASE OF AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT (PACE) PROGRAM GUIDELINES AND PROVIDE DIRECTION ON RANKING CRITERIA OPTIONS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW
In 2019, the direct economic output from agricultural production in San Diego county totaled $1.79 billion. According to the American Farmland Trust, more than one-third of the country’s vegetables and two-thirds of its fruits and nuts are grown in California, yet there is an average loss of nearly 50,000 acres of California farmland and ranchland each year. Since 2009, over 60,000 acres of agricultural land within the San Diego region has been converted to another use – representing a loss of approximately 20% of all agriculturally productive lands within the county. The County of San Diego’s (County) Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program promotes the long-term preservation of agricultural land in the unincorporated area. Willing property owners are compensated for placing perpetual easements on their agricultural property, limiting future uses to agricultural operations, and extinguishing future development potential. The PACE Program is a key component of the County’s sustainability efforts. Since the inception of the PACE Program in 2011, the County has preserved 2,405 acres of agricultural land.

As directed by the Board of Supervisors (Board) on April 13, 2011 (1), the current PACE Program eligibility is limited to properties that received a reduction in the amount of potential development through changes in land use designations as part of the 2011 General Plan Update; the current eligibility encompasses 101,742 acres. The number of applications received for participation in the program has decreased from 60 applications during the pilot program in 2012 to 12 applications in the 2020 application cycle. Staff continues to receive inquiries from property owners interested in participating in the PACE Program, but many are not eligible because their property did not experience a density reduction in 2011.

The County of San Diego’s 2018 Climate Action Plan (2018 CAP) Greenhouse Gas Reduction Measure T-1.2 (Acquire Agricultural Easements) provided direction to update the PACE Program by expanding the eligibility criteria and increasing the annual easement acquisition goal from 230 acres to 443 acres to help achieve a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction of 2,330 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. Although the Superior Court ordered the County to set aside and vacate the February 14, 2018 (1) approvals and the certification of the Final
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Supplemental Environmental Impact Report, pending adoption of a new Climate Action Plan, the County will continue to independently implement the 26 GHG emissions reduction measures and sustainability initiatives and programs identified in the 2018 Climate Action Plan to reduce GHG emissions to meet the State’s 2030 reduction target. To meet the County’s objectives to promote long-term preservation of agriculture in the unincorporated area and reduce GHG emissions, staff recommends updates to the PACE Program Guidelines to expand the pool of eligible property owners. The proposed eligibility expansion would encompass a total of 628,922 acres within the unincorporated area.

Additionally, staff has prepared options to update the ranking criteria used to select applicants best suited to meet the PACE Program's goals, the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan, and support the County’s climate action planning and sustainability efforts.

This is a request for the Board to adopt new ranking criteria and update the PACE Program Guidelines, which will expand opportunities for preservation by increasing the number of properties eligible in the unincorporated area to participate.

RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
1. Find in accordance with Sections 15061(b)(3), 15317, and 15325(b) that the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program Update is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines because the program consists of the establishment of agricultural preserves, CEQA does not apply to transfers of ownership in land to preserve natural conditions, such as agriculture, and because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment.

2. Adopt the updated Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program Guidelines (Attachment A-1, on file with the Clerk of the Board).

3. Direct staff to implement the updated PACE application ranking criteria based on direction on the options presented.

FISCAL IMPACT
Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2020-21 Operational Plan in the Department of Planning & Development Services. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. To date, a total of $11.2 million has been allocated from the General Fund, of which $4.0 million is currently available to be used for Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program acquisitions through Fiscal Year 2022-23 with no additional funds needed. Annual appropriations will be requested in Fiscal Year 2023-24, estimated to be $1,910,000, and will be included in future Operational Plans after the $4.0M has been spent.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT
By permanently preserving agricultural land and resources, and providing property owners compensation for conservation easements, the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program makes the sustainability of agriculture more viable in the long term. The PACE
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Program supports continued agricultural uses in the unincorporated area by creating more affordable properties for farmers through direct compensation from the County of San Diego for establishing the easement and potential reduced property tax values. The PACE Program also results in greenhouse gas emissions reductions through decreased transportation, energy use, waste, and water consumption based on the reduced development potential associated with preserving agricultural lands.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT
The County of San Diego notified the Community Planning and Sponsor Group (CPSG) Chairs of the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Guidelines update and public outreach period on November 17, 2020. Individual presentations were not requested, nor was formal action taken by any CPSG.

BACKGROUND
Program History
On August 3, 2011 (1), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed staff to develop a pilot Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program as a component of the County of San Diego (County) General Plan Update Implementation Plan as a mechanism to provide an opportunity for farmers impacted by density reductions in the General Plan Update to receive compensation for placing an easement on their land without altering its use. The PACE Program is modeled on the framework of a purchase of development rights program, under which the County compensates willing agricultural property owners for placing a perpetual easement on their agricultural property. PACE Program easements limit future uses to agricultural operations and reduce future development potential. As a result, the agricultural land is preserved, and the property owner receives compensation as a one-time payment that can make its continued use for agriculture more viable.

On December 4, 2013 (3), the Board directed staff to:

- Establish PACE as a County program,
- Provide for continued funding of the PACE Program through an annual General Fund appropriation and funding from project applicants as a mitigation fee for impacting agricultural resources,
- Periodically reopen the PACE application process to interested property owners, and
- Prepare a mitigation program as an expanded component of the PACE Program.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for Determining Significance for Agricultural Resources are used during project review to determine whether a project would impact land identified as an important agricultural resource. As directed by the Board in 2013, if impacts on agricultural resources are proposed, the PACE Mitigation Bank may be selected as a mitigation tool to satisfy project conditions.

On September 17, 2014 (1), the Board approved an ordinance amending the San Diego County Administrative Code to add a mitigation credit fee to allow project applicants impacting agricultural resources to purchase credits from the PACE Mitigation Program as a way to offset
those impacts. The PACE Mitigation Program was incorporated into the County’s CEQA Guidelines for Determining Significance for Agricultural Resources to codify the option to purchase PACE mitigation credits for mitigation of impacts to agricultural resources. An interest accruing trust fund for the PACE Mitigation Program was also established.

The cost of mitigation credits is determined by the fee in effect on the date the final subdivision map is filed, the vesting tentative map application is deemed complete, or the date the building permit is issued, as applicable. The PACE mitigation credit fee is currently $3,827 per acre impacted. To purchase PACE mitigation credits, applicants must have an approved discretionary project with a condition of approval requiring agricultural mitigation. A total of 62.93 credits have been purchased by applicants of approved discretionary projects.

To date, 34 agricultural properties totaling 2,405 acres of farm and ranching lands have been permanently protected by acquiring agricultural conservation easements. The PACE Program utilizes a traditional third-party appraisal process to determine agricultural conservation easement values. Appraisal reports and easement values are reviewed and approved by the Department of General Services, Real Estate Division, and the property owner. The property is not purchased by the County and is still owned and operated by the property owner. The terms of the easement require the property owner to limit the uses of the property to agricultural and associated uses that preserve and protect the agricultural productivity of the property.

**PACE Program Guidelines Update**

On February 14, 2018 (1), the Board directed staff to implement the County’s Climate Action Plan (2018 CAP), which included Measure T-1.2 (Acquire Agricultural Easements). Measure T-1.2 directs the acquisition of agricultural easements through an expanded PACE Program, with a target agricultural easement acquisition goal of 4,430 acres between 2021 and 2030. Pending adoption of a new Climate Action Plan, the County will continue to independently implement the 26 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction measures and sustainability initiatives and programs identified in the 2018 CAP to reduce GHG emissions to meet the State’s 2030 reduction target. By expanding the eligibility criteria and increasing the annual easement acquisition goal from a minimum of 230 acres to a minimum of 443 acres, a GHG emissions reduction of 2,330 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent will be achieved by 2030.

Staff recommends several changes to the PACE Program Guidelines, including expanding the PACE eligibility criteria, establishing an implementation process for PACE Program easement monitoring, updating the PACE application ranking criteria, and several minor changes to simplify the document and clarify current implementation practices. These proposed changes will continue to support the County’s efforts to preserve agricultural activities and resources within the unincorporated area, reduce GHG emissions, and utilize agriculture as a buffer between development and open space. Clean and strikeout versions of the updated PACE Program Guidelines are included in Attachment A. Attachment B summarizes all proposed revisions to the PACE Program Guidelines.
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Eligibility Expansion
The current PACE Program eligibility criteria were established and publicly vetted during the General Plan Update and reviewed by the PACE Advisory Group in 2011. To participate in the PACE Program under the current guidelines, a property owner must meet three eligibility requirements: (1) The property must have been actively farmed and/or ranted for a minimum of two years before applying for the program; (2) the property must have realized a density reduction as a result of the General Plan adopted by the Board on August 3, 2011; and, (3) the property must have had the ability to subdivide under the previous General Plan (in effect before August 3, 2011).

Due to the limited number of properties eligible under the PACE Program, the number of applications received during PACE application cycles has decreased substantially. During the pilot program application cycle in 2012, PDS received 60 applications from interested property owners. Despite sending over 4,000 notices to eligible property owners for the 2020 application cycle, only 12 applications were received. Measure T-1.2 of the 2018 CAP directs the expansion of the PACE Program's eligibility criteria to allow properties that did not realize a density reduction during the 2011 General Plan Update to participate in expanding the number of eligible properties and achieving greater GHG emissions reductions. Staff recommends two updates to the eligibility criteria for Board consideration:

1. Remove the General Plan Update density-reduction requirements.

Currently, eligible properties must have received a density reduction during the 2011 General Plan update to be eligible to participate in the program. The current eligibility criteria encompass 101,742 acres due to the density reduction requirement. The updated eligibility criteria would encompass 628,922 acres, based on the eligible zoning designations under the proposed guidelines. These zoning designations were selected because they are intended to create and preserve areas used for agricultural crop production and enhance residential areas compatible with agricultural uses, including in rural and semi-rural areas where large lots are desired. Eligible properties would still be required to have active agriculture for a minimum of two years before applying for the program.

Easement Monitoring
To ensure each property's agricultural and open space attributes are preserved through compliance with the permitted and prohibited activities outlined in the PACE Program easement, a monitoring component is proposed in this update to the PACE Program Guidelines. The monitoring component is modeled after those used by other jurisdictions with similar agricultural purchase of development rights programs, including the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (NRCS-ACEP) and the Department of Conservation’s (DOC) California Farmland Conservancy Program and the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program. For the County to be eligible for agricultural preservation grants such as these, the requesting agency must have an easement monitoring component. The monitoring program will run on a repeating five-year cycle, including...
ownership review and offsite and onsite inspections as outlined below. Onsite inspection during Year 1 includes an assessment by the County’s contracted third-party appraiser and an appraisal report to be used as the baseline conditions for the PACE Program easement. This will document a participating property’s relevant features and conditions, its improvements, and its natural resources as a baseline to compare with future uses. An annual monitoring worksheet has been created (Attachment C) for years 2 and beyond.

Table 1: Proposed PACE Program Easement Monitoring Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Onsite Inspection</td>
<td>Ownership Review</td>
<td>Offsite Inspection</td>
<td>Offsite Inspection</td>
<td>Offsite Inspection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revised PACE Application Ranking Criteria

PACE applications are reviewed for eligibility and then ranked using the criteria outlined in the PACE Program Guidelines, which currently assess the property’s density reduction realized under the 2011 General Plan, agricultural importance, and contribution to the assemblage of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). Staff recommends updates to the PACE application ranking criteria to support long-term sustainable agriculture and align more closely with similar federal and State programs.

Staff’s recommended updates to the ranking criteria strive to balance the ranking factors to shift the current model’s focus from the farmers impacted by the General Plan Update towards agricultural sustainability and other land preservation benefits. The recommendation includes three changes to the current ranking factors for Board consideration:

1. **Remove the scoring of the General Plan Update density reduction ranking factor.** The reduction in the amount of potential development through changes in land use designations under the 2011 General Plan Update currently has the most influence on an application’s overall ranking and represents a large portion of its total score. Staff recommends removing this factor and focusing on other factors like agricultural importance and GHG emissions reductions to transition the PACE Program’s focus on agricultural sustainability and other land preservation benefits. If a property that received a density reduction under the 2011 General Plan Update meets the new eligibility criteria, they are still eligible to apply; however, the extent of their property’s downzone will no longer be considered in the application ranking.

2. **Adjust the scoring of the agricultural importance ranking factor to increase its weighted value among the other factors.** To ensure that impacts to agricultural lands are consistently considered during the environmental review process, the DOC prepared the Land Evaluation & Site Assessment (LESA) model as a methodology that may be used to assess the relative value of agriculture and farmland. The LESA model includes an evaluation of measurable features such as soil quality, water resource availability, surrounding agricultural lands, and surrounding protected resource lands.
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Due to the unique and varied character of the San Diego region’s agriculture, an alternative approach was developed and outlined in the County’s CEQA Guidelines for Determining Significance for Agricultural Resources, referred to as the Local Agricultural Resource Assessment (LARA) model. Agricultural importance, as determined by the LARA model, evaluates a property’s unique site features and valuable physical agricultural resources to identify the fundamental natural resources that support agricultural production. This includes an evaluation of a property’s soil quality, water availability, and climate as well as an assessment of the surrounding land uses. Currently, a property’s agricultural importance has little weighted value on an application's overall ranking and total score. Staff’s recommendation to increase this ranking factor's influence would allow agricultural importance to have a greater weighted value in the total score when applications are reviewed.

3. Adjust the MSCP ranking factor to no longer prioritize easement acquisitions within the priority acquisitions areas or pre-approved mitigation areas (PAMA). The adopted South County MSCP and draft North and East County MSCPs identify potential conservation areas due to their habitat value or known sensitive species occurrences. Currently, the MSCP ranking factor prioritizes easement acquisitions within these areas. Staff recommends changing this ranking factor to focus on those properties adjacent to (up to 5 miles) the MSCP priority acquisition areas or PAMA and existing preserved lands. This approach will help to create a wildlife buffer between preserved lands and development. In conversations with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and DOC, this change was recommended as some farming practices may impact the County’s open space network and wildlife movement. There are several potential conservation benefits of agricultural preservation in proximity to preserved lands, such as improving soil health, protecting water quality, and reducing noise disturbance.

One comment from an environmental stakeholder requested no change to the current ranking factor to continue contributions to MSCP preserve assembly. Under the MSCP, agricultural lands do not contribute to the preserve assembly goals because they are not considered natural vegetation. Any impacts to natural vegetation on PACE enrolled properties must adhere to applicable laws, including mitigation requirements and any permits or approvals required.

Staff also recommends adding three new ranking factors to support the County’s efforts to reduce GHG emissions through climate action planning, sustainability, and conservation:

1. Add a new ranking factor to prioritize easement acquisitions on properties with the greatest GHG emissions reduction. Under the 2018 CAP Measure T-1.2, GHG emissions reductions are realized through decreased transportation, energy use, waste, and water consumption associated with preserving land that could otherwise be developed. GHG emissions reductions for this ranking factor would be determined based on the number of dwelling units retired to achieve the 2018 CAP’s GHG emissions reduction goals. This
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approach aligns closely with the GHG emissions reduction calculator tool used by the DOC for the SALC program.

2. **Add a new ranking factor to prioritize easement acquisitions on properties that do not interfere with development patterns projected by the County’s General Plan.** GHG emissions reductions based on dwelling units retired would prioritize applications from properties with the highest density, typically near villages or other highly desirable development areas. To balance the GHG emissions reduction ranking factor, this new factor uses a Vehicle Miles Traveled analysis and efficiency areas to determine whether an individual property's conservation would be compatible with development patterns projected by the County’s General Plan. Staff recommends adding this factor to ensure GHG emissions reductions are being achieved while also avoiding preservation in high-density areas that would interfere with the County’s housing affordability efforts.

3. **Add a new ranking factor to prioritize easement acquisitions from landowners within the MSCP priority acquisition areas who are willing to implement conservation best management practices (BMPs).** During outreach meetings with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife, it was recommended that PACE landowners within MSCP priority acquisition areas or PAMA incorporate some best-management practices to allow wildlife movement. BMPs such as limiting electrical fencing can reduce potential interference with wildlife habitat and connectivity. Staff continues to receive inquiries from landowners interested in providing co-benefits to endangered and threatened species that inhabit their land. This recommendation is to incentivize these practices by increasing the points awarded to an application within MSCP priority acquisition areas or PAMA. This will not be a requirement and no additional points will be awarded if the landowner does not volunteer to perform wildlife conservation BMPs in these areas. Landowners willing to perform these BMPs within these areas would agree to additional terms within their PACE Program easement to conform with wildlife conservation efforts and would be awarded additional points on their application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Ranking Factors</th>
<th>Proposed Ranking Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 General Plan density reduction</td>
<td>Agricultural importance based on the LARA model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural importance based on the LARA model</td>
<td>Contribution as a wildlife buffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the assemblage of the MSCP</td>
<td>GHG emissions reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compatibility with land use development patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary wildlife best-management practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Current and Proposed Ranking Criteria Comparison**

**Ranking Criteria Options**
Individual ranking factors can be weighted using a multiplier to adjust their influence among the rest of the ranking factors. A multiplier, when applied, emphasizes an individual factor to weigh more (i.e. count more) in the total scoring. This allows the County to prioritize and select properties for participation that support different PACE Program benefits. There are five options for Board consideration based on the recommended changes to the ranking factors above. The options
proposed support the agricultural, climate planning, and wildlife benefits separately by assigning multipliers to only those corresponding ranking factors (summarized in Table 3). Staff recommends Option 2 (Agricultural Importance Emphasis) to focus easement acquisitions on lands with the highest agricultural value and to align with the intent of the PACE Mitigation Bank.

Table 3: Ranking Criteria Options – Proposed Ranking Factor Multipliers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking Factors</th>
<th>Option 1: Equal Emphasis</th>
<th>Option 2: Agricultural Importance Emphasis (Staff Rec.)</th>
<th>Option 3: GHG Reduction Potential Emphasis</th>
<th>Option 4: Wildlife Conservation Emphasis</th>
<th>Option 5: Board Directed Weighted Factors*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural importance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution as a wildlife buffer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHG emissions reduction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility with land uses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary wildlife best-management practices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Multipliers can be assigned to individual ranking factors to combine the different options presented.

Option 1: Equal Emphasis
Option 1 allows for equal consideration of all ranking factors when selecting applicants for the program's participation with no emphasis on any of the individual factors. Because the staff recommended updates to the ranking criteria establish a scoring system that balances the maximum possible points for each ranking factor, multipliers are not assigned to the ranking factors under this option.

Option 2 (Staff Recommendation): Agricultural Importance Emphasis
Option 2 provides a greater emphasis on the agricultural importance of an individual property. By doubling the maximum possible points for the agricultural importance ranking factor, properties that give the highest overall LARA model scores would be prioritized for participation. This option may also result in a greater accumulation of agricultural lands to be used for mitigation for impacts to agricultural resources. PACE Program easements are in perpetuity and will limit the use of the property to primarily agricultural operations. Emphasizing the agricultural viability as a ranking factor will ensure properties chosen for an easement have the climate, water, and soil resources to sustain successful agricultural uses for the life of the easement. This option best supports the goals of the program, will allow the County to prioritize properties more likely to satisfy the intended purpose of the PACE Mitigation Bank, and was the most preferred option among stakeholders participating in public review of the proposed updates. Because the PACE Mitigation Bank is intended to mitigate for significant impacts to agricultural resources, focusing easement acquisitions on properties with the greatest agricultural resources will strengthen this mitigation tool.
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Option 3: GHG Emissions Reduction Emphasis
Option 3 provides a greater emphasis on the GHG emissions reductions that result from lowering the number of allowable dwelling units on an individual property. By applying a multiplier of three to the GHG emissions reductions ranking factor, properties which have the greatest GHG emissions reduction would be prioritized for participation in the PACE Program.

This option would also include a multiplier of two to the consistency with land development patterns ranking factor. Because staff anticipates the largest GHG reductions would occur in urban areas with the highest potential density, the land use compatibility factor was developed to balance the GHG emissions reduction factor. This factor does not, however, directly assess potential GHG emission reductions and is therefore not given as much emphasis. Through the implementation of this option, the overall 2018 CAP Measure T-1.2 goals would not change.

Option 4: Wildlife Conservation Emphasis
Option 4 provides a greater emphasis on individual properties that support the County’s wildlife conservation efforts. Through implementation of this option, properties that contribute as a buffer between preserved lands and development areas and applicants willing to implement BMPs for habitat conservation would be prioritized. This would be achieved by doubling the maximum possible points for the wildlife buffer ranking factor, focusing easement acquisition on properties in closer proximity to preserved lands, MSCP priority acquisition areas, or PAMA. This option also includes an equal emphasis on the wildlife conservation BMPs ranking factor to further support wildlife conservation efforts within the planned open space network.

Option 5: Board Directed Weighted Factors
Should the Board choose to emphasize more than one benefit of the program, multipliers can be adjusted and assigned to each ranking factor individually. For example, the Board may direct a combination of the options to emphasize multiple ranking factors.

A public review period was held from November 16 – December 18, 2020. This included two virtual public webinars that included participants representing the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, City of Oceanside, Building Industry Association of San Diego, environmental and engineering consulting firms, wineries, educational institutions, and landowners within the unincorporated area. During these outreach meetings, Option 2 (Agricultural Importance Emphasis) was most preferred by the participants with seven votes, however considerable support was also given to Option 3 (GHG Emissions Reduction Emphasis) and Option 4 (Wildlife Conservation Emphasis) with five votes each. Staff also presented to the San Diego Farm Bureau’s Board of Directors on December 2, 2020, which included over 30 attendees. Staff received a letter from the San Diego Farm Bureau in support of the proposed updates; support for an individual option was not specified and their comments focused on the expansion of properties eligible to apply. A letter was also received from the Endangered Habitats League in support of the proposed updates, but requested consideration of a combination of Option 2 (Agricultural Importance Emphasis) and Option 4 (Wildlife Conservation Emphasis).
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ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT
The acquisition of agricultural conservation easements is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines in accordance with Section 15317, as it involves the transfer of ownership of land to preserve agriculture and natural conditions. The acquisition of agricultural easements and establishment of a permanent Purchase of Agricultural Easement program are exempt from the provisions of the CEQA Guidelines in accordance with Sections 15061(b)(3) and 15325(b) because CEQA does not apply to transfers of ownership in land to preserve natural conditions, such as agriculture, and because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN
The requested action for acquiring agricultural conservation easements supports the Sustainable Environments Strategic Initiative in the County of San Diego’s 2021-2026 Strategic Plan by implementing land use strategies that protect and promote natural and agricultural resources.

Respectfully submitted,

SARAH E. AGHASSI
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)
Note: Due to the size of the attachments, the documents are available online through the Clerk of the Board’s website at www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/cob/bosa.html.

Attachment A-1 UPDATED PACE PROGRAM GUIDELINES (CLEAN COPY)
Attachment A-2 UPDATED PACE PROGRAM GUIDELINES (INFORMATIONAL STRIKE-OUT/ UNDERLINE COPY)
Attachment B UPDATED PACE PROGRAM GUIDELINES SUMMARY OF CHANGES
Attachment C PACE PROGRAM ANNUAL MONITORING WORKSHEET
Attachment D ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION
Attachment E PUBLIC COMMUNICATION
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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: ☐ Yes ☒ No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED
☐ Yes ☒ No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:
On September 11, 2019 (2), approved the purchase of two agricultural conservation easements; On February 14, 2018 (1), approved the County’s Climate Action Plan which expands the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program; On November 16, 2016 (3), approved the purchase of two agricultural conservation easements; On September 17, 2014 (1), approved the purchase of eight agricultural conservation easements and expanded the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program to include a mitigation component; On December 4, 2013 (3), established the Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program as an on-going County Program; On July 17, 2013 (5), approved the purchase of five agricultural conservation easements; On August 3, 2011 (1), the Board of Supervisors directed staff to develop a Pilot Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program as a component of the General Plan Update Implementation Plan.

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:
I-133, Support and Encouragement of Farming in San Diego County

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:
N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:
General Plan Conformance
On June 10, 2019, pursuant to Government Code Section 65402 and 65566, Planning & Development Services made a finding of consistency with the General Plan, based on its preliminary review of the location, purpose, and extent of the proposed acquisitions. The acquisition of agricultural easements is directly related to Goal LU-7 of the Land Use Element for protecting farming and agriculture as beneficial resources that contribute to the County’s rural character.

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):
N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Planning & Development Services

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S): N/A
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