



Land trust vows to continue

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Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust (BALT), is neither broken nor bowed in the wake of the City Council's decision not to fund it after June 30, according to its chief administrator.

BALT Executive Director Kathryn Lyddan this week announced that its board had expanded from seven to 12 members, none of whom are appointed by or represent the city of Brentwood.

Joining the expanded board are former county supervisor Tom Powers, currently chairman of the county Agricultural Advisory Task Force and chairman of the Contra Costa Wine and Grape & Olive Growers Association, and John Chapman, former trustee of the East Bay Community Foundation and currently a member of the Local Advisory Committee of the Local Initiative Support Corporation and the Greenbelt Alliance board. Lyddan stated this week in an e-mail press release that "The board has also invited two other important members of the agricultural community to join it – I hope that I'll be able to confirm their membership (soon)." Lyddan called the city's decision to withdraw funding "distressing," but said it will be business as usual come July 1 – and no more city money.

During a telephone interview, Lyddan, a Moraga resident and executive director of BALT since it was founded in 2002 with the city's help, said the organization has many successful Bay Area mentors to emulate.

She said the land trust has proven it can get grants. It got one from the Columbia Foundation and another from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a combined \$115,000.

After underwriting BALT's administrative costs for nearly five years, Brentwood City Council members in April decided to not renew the current funding, which runs through June 30. Since 2002, Brentwood has spent about \$600,000 on administrative costs. Lyddan employs a staff of one.

Councilman Erick Stonebarger said in a telephone interview this week that he supported the city's move to cut off the trust's funding.

"I recommended to discontinue funding because the acquisition of easements hasn't been very successful. We didn't think that continuing funding was in the best interest of those funds. We would like to use it for different things, the last of which is administration. We want to get the best bang for our buck for the agricultural industry out there and we don't think we were," said Stonebarger, a member of a Brentwood farming family.

He also said that the ordinance creating the land trust and the agricultural land preservation program needs to be rewritten to make it more effective. "That will take more time."

The land trust evolved out of an agricultural preservation program the city developed in early 2002. The idea was that an independent land trust would negotiate with farmers to put their lands in conservation easements, allowing them to farm and avoid pressure to sell to developers.

Lyddan said on Monday that the organization has negotiated three such easements and is nearing completion of two more.

Disappointed by the city's action, Lyddan, a former attorney, said the land trust will continue to apply for grants, hold fundraisers and work on other funding sources.

"We won't quit," she said. "There's still an important job to be done that many people feel passionately about. The BALT board will be expanding so we can draw in larger segments of the community."

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