

## Land trust vows to continue mission

● **BRENTWOOD:** After city cuts funding for administration, nonprofit group says it will use raise funds to keep up its work

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Members of East County's agricultural conservation organization said Wednesday they plan to continue preserving farmland and promoting local produce, with or without Brentwood's financial support.

The Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust board of directors held an emergency meeting this week to discuss ways to keep the organization thriving after the City Council decided to end administrative funding for the nonprofit group starting June 30.

The group decided it will tap into the community through fundraising events and aggressively pursue grants to finance its mission to conserve East County farmland and create more economic opportunities for farmers, said Kathryn Lyddan, executive director of the land trust.

Until the organization can raise money, the group's marketing programs and land conservation efforts will be put on hold, she said.

"We are still in shock and trying to pull ourselves together and figure out what we can continue to do and what we have to completely put on hold," Lyddan said.

In the next few weeks, the board will meet again to discuss possibly expanding its board of directors as well as possible fundraising events.

Land trust board members said they think East County communities will step up to support the program in its effort to help agriculture.

"We have a vote of confidence that we have a pretty strong program, and it's a matter of shifting gears and adapting to the fact that the city will no longer fund administrative expenses," said Mike Strle, a board member.

The Brentwood City Council this month decided to stop paying administrative costs for the land trust, which included funding two staff members. The city has paid roughly \$600,000 in administrative expenses since the program was created four years ago.

City officials said that while Brentwood is committed to preserving agriculture, they believe the money spent on the land trust's administration could go toward other ag-enterprise projects closer to Brentwood, such as agriculture parks and co-ops.

The city helped create the land trust in 2002, with the intent to purchase land conservation easements in East County. Easements help protect farmland from future development.

The city has collected roughly \$9 million in developer fees, most of which has been set aside to buy easements. So far, the program has tapped that fund to secure three easements, the group said.

Even if they have cut funding for administration, city leaders say they want to work with the land trust to

continue conserving viable farm land, said Councilman Erick Stonebarger, who is also a Brentwood farmer.

"I would like to see BALT continue to pursue easements and bring them to the city so the city can vote on acquiring them or not," he said.

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