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R-21-116  
Meeting 21-21  
November 18, 2021

**AGENDA ITEM #4**

To: Board of Directors  
Open Space Authority

From: Andrea Mackenzie  
General Manager

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**SUBJECT**

Informational Item: Presentation of the Open Space Authority's Land Acknowledgement Statement

**REVENUE/COST**

There is no cost associated with this item.

**BACKGROUND**

Indigenous Peoples have lived, cared for, and developed cultural practices and traditions which are intertwined with the land in this region, for many thousands of years. European arrival in North America, succeeded by Spanish colonists and missionaries, forever changed indigenous ways of life. Through the periods associated with Spanish missionization, the Mexican Republic, and California statehood, local Indigenous Peoples endured disease, cultural repression, loss of land and displacement, and targeted violence and killing. By 1870, the pre-contact population of up to 300,000 First Peoples dwindled to, by some estimates, a staggering 20,000 individuals. Systems favoring colonization, racism, and paternalism guided injustice and loss of life.

Despite years of violent adversity and erasure, local Tribes have endured to protect their language, culture, and heritage. Tribes continue to serve as stewards of land and culture and seek access to lands that represent historic territories.

A land acknowledgement is a way to recognize the Indigenous Peoples and traditional territories of a place and the enduring relationship that exists between these Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories, while also acknowledging the genocide, violence, injustice, and cultural erasure that occurred in those places.

The Open Space Authority (Authority) has developed a land acknowledgement to:

- Acknowledge the history of violence and oppression of local Indigenous Peoples and the impacts of that past which last today;
- Provoke thought and discussion as we steward lands from which the original stewards were violently displaced; and
- Demonstrate respect to our tribal partners.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority's mission is to *"conserve the natural environment, support agriculture, and connect people to nature by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations."*

We will only be successful if, through our mission, our work is inclusive, just, and equitable. We prioritize these values as we work to adopt our vision of the future; our vision of *"the Santa Clara Valley and its surrounding hillsides as a beautiful place where a vibrant network of interconnected open spaces, trails, wildlife habitats, and thriving agricultural lands enrich the region's cities and make it an exceptional and healthy place to live, work, learn, and play."*

To effectively adopt this vision of the future, we must recognize our past. The evidence of historic habitation by Indigenous Peoples is found on lands managed by the Authority. We preserve and restore landscapes in a region with a complicated and challenging recent history, with enduring complications that impact and shape the present.

To bring awareness to the ongoing relationship between the land and those who were its stewards for millennia, the Authority has developed the following formal land acknowledgement statement:

*The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority carries out its mission to protect, restore, and connect people to the land in the Santa Clara Valley and surrounding Santa Cruz and Diablo Range Mountains. These lands are the ancestral and unceded territories of the Awaswas-, Chochenyo-, Mutsun-, Tamyen-, and Yokut-speaking peoples. As a public agency, it is our responsibility to acknowledge the historically documented violence and injustice that occurred as local tribal groups were forcibly displaced from these lands. We also acknowledge and respect Indigenous Peoples of this place, including the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area, who work today to restore and protect their culture and connect to the land.*

This statement was prepared by an interdepartmental team in consultation with members of local Tribes. Staff anticipates reading the land acknowledgement at the opening of formal public events, partner meetings, presentations, or site tours. The Authority may update the acknowledgement and/or its application over time based on learning and a desire to improve tribal partnerships over time.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

This report is for informational purposes only and does not require Board action.

Prepared by:

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