

Register Guard  
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By Ed Russo

## **Council Agrees to Buy 26 Acres as Open Space**

Nearly 15 years of advocacy and a sizable chunk of cash will pay off for south Eugene residents who sought to preserve forested land near the Amazon Creek headwaters.

The City Council on Monday evening unanimously voted to partner with the Be Noble Foundation on a \$1.775 million purchase of 26 acres near Martin Street and West Amazon Drive in south Eugene.

The city will contribute \$1.125 million, the foundation \$625,000 and the Lane County Audubon Society \$25,000.

“Future generations will be grateful to us for saving this land,” said south Eugene City Councilor Betty Taylor, who long had urged the council to buy the property.

The parkland will be purchased in the next 60 days from Dynasty Holdings, a real estate investment firm that last July received the property from its previous debt-laden owners who had unsuccessfully tried to develop the property with houses.

The city will get the \$1.125 million from the 2006 voter-approved parks and open space bond measure.

Over the years, representatives of the Southeast Neighbors neighborhood association had asked the council to acquire the land so it could be kept as open space.

The council earlier in the year said the city would be willing to buy the land under two conditions: The land had to be fairly priced, and residents had to contribute to the acquisition.

South Eugene residents Deborah and Peter Noble established the Be Noble Foundation in honor of their son, Erin, who was killed in a 2012 plane crash near Veneta.

Deborah Noble attended the council meeting on Monday and said the foundation’s contribution secured the city’s commitment.

“I definitely feel that (private) money was a big piece,” she said. “The city manager (Jon Ruiz) was very interested in private money going in.”

North Eugene Councilor Mike Clark said the Amazon Creek headwaters land was not listed as a potential open space acquisition during the bond measure campaign. But the purchase “fits the criteria for what those funds were put in front of the public to do,” he said. “I think it’s a worthwhile effort.”

The hillside property near the streams that feed Amazon Creek had been owned for years by Martin and Leslie Beverly, who had tried to put housing developments on the land.

The land is designated in the Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Area General Plan, the official growth blueprint, for low-density residential development.

But getting building approval from the city was a challenge for the Beverlys, partly because of the land's hilly topography and proximity to streams, plus opposition from neighboring residents and, at times, city planning officials.

After defeats on three different building scenarios, the Beverlys last October won a victory when the state Court of Appeals upheld a Eugene Planning Commission ruling that the couple was entitled to create a 47-lot planned unit development on 18 of the acres.

By last winter, however, the Beverlys were struggling to keep up with payments related to the property, according to records filed with Lane County.

About that time, the couple let it be known that they were asking \$2.5 million for the land, or \$96,154 an acre.

In July the couple gave the land to Dynasty, rather than lose it to foreclosure.

The deal with Dynasty will pay it an average of \$45,192 an acre.

The joint purchase by the city, the Nobles and the Audubon Society will come 15 years after the Beverlys sold 15 acres to the city and the Audubon Society for \$180,000. The city used the land to expand the Amazon headwaters trail network and build a trailhead and creek-crossing bridges off Canyon Drive.

Nine years later, the council approved buying 40 nearby acres from a developer for \$1.6 million so it wouldn't be used for housing. About a third of the purchase price, \$500,000, came from the parks bond measure.

Mayor Kitty Piercy thanked the Nobles for their part in the purchase, and said the land will be an asset for all residents, not just those in south Eugene.

“Like the Rivers to Ridges trails, this land is preserved for all of those who live here or visit,” she said. “It is a community asset and should be recognized as such. Whether you live north, south, east or west, this land is for you to enjoy and benefit from its preservation.”

Follow Ed on Twitter @edwardrusso . Email [ed.russo@registerguard.com](mailto:ed.russo@registerguard.com) .

See City of Eugene Press Release for maps.