

Seven Hills Ranch at Risk of Development

Seven Hills Ranch, 30 acres of open land next to Heather Farm Park, is probably the largest undeveloped parcel in Walnut Creek, although it is actually in the County, not the City. It is home to a seasonal wetland and a wildlife corridor. For many years, the Foundation has kept its eye on this land, knowing the day would come when someone proposed a new use for it. That day has arrived. The proposal is for a very dense, age-in-place senior community that requires an up-front buy-in.



At Risk – Thirty-acre Seven Hills Ranch, home to a seasonal wetland and a wildlife corridor, could become the site of a very dense senior community. *Photo: Rosemary Nishikawa, SevenHillsRanch.org*

Efforts to preserve the land as pure open space have so far been unsuccessful. However, there might be various conservation-compatible uses for the land – perhaps an institutional or educational use of some sort,

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JoAnn Hanna



JoAnn Hanna – JoAnn Hanna (center) with two of her pals, the late naturalist/columnist Gary Bogue, and fellow-artist, Shirley Nootbaar.

JoAnn Hanna, another one of those special people whose work in the late 1960s and 1970s helped create the open space areas we all treasure, has sadly passed on. That legacy is a significant part of what makes Walnut Creek a special place to live. She was 94. She had recently moved to Richmond, Virginia, to be near her daughter, Nancy.

The battle to establish the open space was an epic one that involved a group of citizens fighting city hall to stop a development that would have destroyed a significant part of our open space. After a referendum overturned the City Council's approval of that development, the City Council created the Walnut Creek Open Space Action Committee. JoAnn served on that committee as a representative of the Planning Commission. The Committee met for 2½ years and produced the Walnut Creek Park, Trail, Conservations, and Open Space Plan. It was approved by the City Council in October 1973. One of its recommendations was to do a municipal bond to fund open space acquisition.

In April 1974, the voters approved that municipal bond measure that has funded the purchase of most of the open space areas we enjoy today. JoAnn also had a significant role in that Committee's recommendation of a Hillside Ordinance. JoAnn's contributions are memorialized as Hanna Trail, which is near Borges Ranch, named in recognition of her contributions.

Prior to JoAnn's death, her contributions were recognized by the City Council when it closed a meeting in September in her honor.

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New Family-Oriented Restoration Project: Planting Oaks

This fall, we started a new project to involve our WCOSF members in restoring native plants in our Open Space. We want to involve families as well as adults in this project.

This year we are planting oaks in locations where they once grew and where there are vacancies now. We started on September 19th by gathering acorns near the Sutherland Drive entrance to Shell Ridge Open Space.

Keeping an event safe and productive in this year has been a challenge. The initial acorn gathering event had to be postponed for a week due to smoke from wildfires in nearby counties. To keep us safe from COVID-19, everyone wore masks and observed social distancing outside their pod group. In spite of the difficulties, we succeeded in gathering the healthy, mature acorns that we needed and everyone enjoyed the morning's work.

On October 31st, we walked in the same area looking for planting sites. We involved everyone including children who ranged from 8 to 13 years old in picking planting sites, marking them and recording locations. As we walked, we shared information about geology, plants and animals in our Open Space. Shortly after we discussed granary trees where acorn woodpeckers store acorns, a 13 year-old girl spotted such a granary tree. Part of the joy of being out in nature is in making such personal discoveries.

Five families attended the first event and three of those families returned for the second event. Several of the families knew each other already which made the event more fun for them. Adult volunteers also attended



Families Gather — Several families pitched in to gather acorns in September for planting in December and January in Shell Ridge Open Space. *Photo: Kime Smith*

those events and were productive. Several WCOSF board members and other experienced volunteers helped attendees get started and be successful.

In late December and January, we'll have events to plant acorns. In February and March, we'll inspect the planting sites and install Tubex cylinders to shade oak seedlings and to protect the emerging plants from ground squirrels and voles. In summer, we'll water the seedlings to improve their chances of making it through their first year.

In the early 1970s, residents made a long-term commitment to preserving our Open Space. It is up to us to pass that respect for our Open Space and the commitment to preserve it to new generations. We are doing that through family-oriented nature walks and through this family-oriented restoration project.

—Bill Hunt

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perhaps a new twist on a more common use.

Three things you can do to help right now:

- Send any suggestions you have for innovative land uses to us at: contact@wcosf.org, subject "Seven Hills Ranch".
- Sign the petition at <https://savesevenhillsranch.org> then ask your friends to sign and spread the word to their networks.
- Volunteer your knowledge, skills, and connections to help at either of the above links

—Lesley Hunt

Rock Oak Pond Protected

The Foundation in September finished a project in North Lime Ridge to complete the fencing around Rock Oak’s ephemeral pond.

In the past, the pond was fenced through the middle to enable cattle to use the pond water. Because the previous fence was submerged much of the year, it required periodic replacement. Since the installation of troughs in the area the pond was no longer needed as a water source.

The project also included removal of the remains of the mid-pond fencing and repair of a section of fence on an adjacent enclosure. The enclosures protect Foundation planting of native trees and shrubs from grazing cattle.

The extended enclosure will allow the Foundation to plant willows and cottonwoods around the rim of the pond and eliminate the need for periodic replacement of a submerged fencing segment.

—Kime Smith



Don’t Fence Them In — Sam Rangel of Rangel Fencing and Gary Muerle, Team Leader of the Oak Habitat Restoration Project, view completed pond fencing. *Photo: Kime Smith*

JoAnn Hanna

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In addition, JoAnn was the owner of a retail store known as JoAnn’s, which she operated for 52 years. She was very proud of being the first woman to own and successfully operate a retail store in Walnut Creek.

We are very grateful for the courage it took those residents to stop the rampant growth in Walnut Creek at the end of the 1950s and 1960s (when Walnut Creek was the fastest growing city in each decade) and the hard work to create the first municipal bond ever to fund open space acquisition. Perhaps we should do this again. We are saddened by the passing of JoAnn and some of the others that contributed so much. We hope their contributions to our community are remembered for a long time.

—Bob Simmons

Please Share Your Email

Most of you have already shared your email address with us, but we have no fast way to communicate with the 25% who haven’t. The only times we really need it is to reach you quickly when we have an issue in front of the City government as we do now. If you would consider sharing, you’ll hear from us maybe once a year. To share, please write to contact@wcosf.org with a title like “sharing email” and give us your name (because it isn’t always obvious from the email address).

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Yes, I want to help protect and preserve Walnut Creek's Open Spaces.

We invite you to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation. Memberships and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. There are numerous areas where you can help. Interested? Drop us an email at volunteer@wcosf.org, visit our website at www.wcosf.org, or fill out the form below and mail it to WCOSF, Box 309, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0309.

I would like to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

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EMAIL (WE NEVER SHARE)

PATRON-\$500 BENEFACTOR-\$250 SUSTAINING-\$100 SPONSOR-\$50 FAMILY-\$40 INDIVIDUAL-\$25

I WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER TO: MAINTAIN OAKS PLANT NATIVES CREATE WILDLIFE CORRIDORS HELP WITH OUTREACH

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