



DATE: February 4, 2019

TO: Council Economic Development Committee

FROM: Deputy City Manager

SUBJECT: Preliminary Project Review – Iron Ox, 24985 Hesperian Blvd

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council Economic Development Committee provides feedback to the project development team on their initial proposal for the site.

SUMMARY

The development team, Iron Ox, is requesting a preliminary review of their site design and proposed uses for the addition of a new commercial agricultural use to the existing agricultural site. Staff has not performed any site analysis on this proposal prior to the presentation at the meeting. The following report is to provide the members of the CEDC with the existing development standards of the agricultural zoning district as well as existing goals and policies of the General Plan for the site.

BACKGROUND

The proposed project site is located at 24985 Hesperian Boulevard. The site is approximately 8.59 acres, with the proposed use utilizing the 4 acres located on the north side of the property. The property is currently occupied by a historically designated Victorian house constructed in 1867, a caretaker's unit, barn and other farm related structures. All existing structures would remain as they currently exist. The farm is in operation by the property owner. The owner of the site utilizes the existing Victorian house as office space for the management of this and other agricultural locations throughout the state.

DISCUSSION

Iron Ox, headquartered in San Carlos, is a robotics company building the world's first autonomous farm. The company is seeking to reinvent farming from the ground up by leveraging advancements in plant science, machine learning, and robotics to grow local, sustainable, and affordable produce to feed the world's growing population. Their use of hydroponics and robotics allows for the production of 30 times the amount of produce compared to traditional farming methods, while using 90% less water. Their current facility in San Carlos is an indoor facility using artificial light. They are seeking to develop a greenhouse facility to perfect their methods of robotic growing utilizing natural light.

The Iron Ox development team has requested to present a preliminary design to the CEDC to receive feedback on their proposed layout of the site and future uses proposed to be located on the property. As part of their proposal, they are proposing to construct new greenhouse structures that will be used for the production of produce and new office trailers for their staff, visitors, and buyers. Staff has not performed any detailed analysis of this proposed project, as it will be subject to a full review and analysis by staff and the appropriate review bodies when a formal application is submitted to the City.

The following information is for the CEDC to have available for their use as they hear the presentation.

General Plan Designation, Goals and Policies

The proposed project site has a General Plan designation of Public and Quasi-Public Uses. This designation generally applies to major governmental, educational, cultural, and health care facilities located throughout the city. Properties may be developed with a variety of public and quasi-public uses, including community centers, recreation centers, government offices, hospitals, primary and secondary schools, college and university campuses, transit stations, and other related government facilities and services. The site is currently privately owned and has been so by the same family for many decades. A potential General Plan amendment may be needed for the project to allow for the increased commercial agricultural operations.

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Goal ED-1: Diversify the economic base of Hayward to support a robust and stable economy with a diverse range of employment, shopping, and cultural opportunities for residents.

The proposed use supports this economic development goal in that the use not only brings a diverse range of jobs to the City of Hayward, including robotics operators, but also plant scientist, certified growers, packers, and more. In addition, Iron Ox hopes to partner with the local schools, colleges, and the community to open the site as an opportunity to learn about food production, robotics, and other technological advancements taking place in the farming industry.

Zoning Regulations

The site is currently zoned Agricultural. This district is intended to preserve agricultural uses until such time orderly development takes place. The permitted uses for the district include:

SEC. 10-1.2015 – Uses Permitted

- a. Primary Uses. The following uses, or uses determined to be similar by the Planning Director, are permitted in the A District as primary uses.
 - 1. Agricultural Uses
 - a) Crop and tree farming. (Including truck gardening, nurseries, greenhouses, apiaries, hatcheries, aviaries, flower or vegetable gardens and similar uses)

- b) Farm or ranch. (For the grazing or breeding of livestock, provided livestock is not kept within a distance of 40 feet from any dwelling, or the boundary of any district other than A or FP Districts.)
- c) Sale of fruits, vegetables, and flowers grown on premises. (Provided sales or displays are not conducted from a motor vehicle, or a structure or stand exceeding 300 square feet in area.)

The project being presented to the CEDC is consistent with allowed uses for the site; however it has not been evaluated as to whether it conforms to current zoning standards and design guidelines in relation to the building placement and ancillary structures on site. Upon submittal the project will receive a full evaluation. At this time, the applicant is only seeking feedback on the proposed design in terms of general layout and potential uses.

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT

At this time, there is no economic and fiscal impact associated with this preliminary review. A full economic and fiscal analysis will be completed when a formal application is submitted to the City.

Prepared by: Catherine Ralston, Economic Development Specialist

Recommended by: Jennifer Ott, Deputy City Manager

Approved by:



Kelly McAdoo, City Manager