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More than 1,500 want Turner's farm to stay one

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BRENTWOOD — They took their case door to door, onto the Web and into the parks, and now Brentwood residents could have a chance at keeping Cal Turner's farm green forever.

Citizens for Brentwood Green Space, a nonprofit organization led by businessman Stephen Prince, recently announced that the group has collected more than 1,500 signatures.

Each name represents a Brentwood resident who wants the opportunity to vote on having the city buy and preserve various green spaces within the city, with the Turner farm No. 1 on the list.

"It took a lot of work on the part of a lot of people. There's no telling how many hours we've spent," Prince said. "Now we're ready to take it to the next level."

The organization plans to take its petition to city commissioners and ask them to call a referendum, allowing the public to vote on whether the city should issue up to \$50 million in general obligation bonds to acquire and preserve open space.

"I don't think we have to win them over," Prince said of commissioners, none of whom have taken an official stance on the issue. "I think that having gotten the number (of signatures) we've gotten, they're willing to let the people speak."

What's the catch? Taking out a bond that big would almost certainly mean an increase in property taxes — something Brentwood hasn't seen in 14 years.

"It's a decision that the citizens would have to make because of the magnitude of that decision," City Manager Mike Walker said.

When the Citizens for Brentwood Green Space present their case to commissioners, Walker said their task will be to "convince the commission that there is a strong interest out there in moving this forward."

If the commission feels that the interest is there, it alone has the power to call a referendum.

"The petition itself does not call for a referendum. The commission does that," Walker said.

The signatures still have to be verified, but Prince said he hoped the sheer numbers garnered by the grassroots campaign would go a long way towards impressing the commission.

"That's a pretty big percentage," he said. Fifteen hundred signatures represents about 5% of Brentwood's nearly 31,000 population.

If commissioners do decide to hold a referendum, the vote would most likely be held before the November general election. Costs would be paid by the city.

Citizens for Brentwood Green Space plans to present its petition to the City Commission June 10, with a decision from commissioners tentatively arriving June 28.