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## Group wants candidates seeing green Prospect of higher taxes has hindered past open-space preservation efforts

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### ELECTION 2007 | CITY COMMISSION

**BRENTWOOD** — If the group Citizens for Brentwood Green Space has anything to do with it, its cause will be a prominent issue in the upcoming City Commission election.

With the goal of preserving "the beautiful Brentwood everyone loves," the nonprofit interest group hopes its upcoming candidates forum will allow its members and the public to gauge commission hopefuls' stance on preservation of green space and corresponding development issues.

Citizens for Brentwood Green Space has lobbied since 2003 to spur the city's leadership into a more aggressive approach for identifying and setting tracts of Brentwood's celebrated hillsides and scenic vistas for parks, trails and flood plains.

During the 2004 city election, the organization requested and narrowly lost a referendum that would have authorized the city to issue as much as \$50 million in bonds to acquire and preserve open space in the city.

The issue was divisive, in part, because of the accompanying threat of increased property taxes — something Brentwood residents haven't seen in 17 years.

But Stephen Prince, the group's founder, believes once the public has a clearer understanding of what is at stake, any threat of a higher tax bill might not be as menacing.

Mostly, though, the group wants to communicate with voters its concern that the city's natural environment is at risk.

"The message is that what you see here today isn't what you're going to see here tomorrow if we don't do something to preserve what we have now," member Gil Hutchinson said.

### OSRD zoning too exclusive

And the organization doesn't accept the ambitious Open Space Residential Zoning, which allows homes on smaller plots of land in exchange for saving green space elsewhere in a development, as an adequate response to what it views as a growing shortage of community green space.

"Don't get me wrong," Prince said. "We love OSRD. It's just not community accessible. It's green space set aside only for the people who live in a particular development. That's not exactly what we're after."

### CANDIDATES FORUM NEXT WEDNESDAY

Citizens for Brentwood Green Space will hold a City Commission candidates forum at 6:30 p.m. April 4 at the Brentwood Library. For more information, visit

[www.brentwoodgreenspace.org](http://www.brentwoodgreenspace.org)  
**MAIN GOALS** • Adding 1,000 acres of new parkland • Connecting additional areas of the city by bikeways and walkways • Preserving historic sites • Enhancing pastoral gateways to the city • Making open spaces accessible  
[www.brentwoodgreenspace.org](http://www.brentwoodgreenspace.org)

Instead, the group wants the city's incoming leadership to commit to preserving at least 1,000 of the approximate 7,000 remaining developable acres in Brentwood.

While Prince acknowledges the endeavor could require an elevated tax, he also notes that by limiting the amount of development in favor of green space, the city could actually save itself money in the long run.

"The reason we haven't had a tax increase in so long is because the growth has continued to cover the costs," Prince said. "What happens when that growth stops after build-out in 2016? Every lot that we don't build on is an overhead dollar that the city doesn't have to cover in the future. What people don't always realize is that once the growth stops, somebody's going to have to pay for everything that's here."

But Hutchinson believes the city can take creative — and possibly tax-free — measures to preserve the land. Whether it be land grants from private owners or through fundraising, Hutchinson says there are plenty of ways to ease the city into the idea of preservation.

### **Advisers on drawing board**

But protecting green space isn't a foreign concept to Brentwood residents or its leadership. The results of the city's 2020 Plan citizen survey revealed that more than 80 percent of respondents valued preservation of Brentwood's farms and other open-space properties, though a substantially smaller percentage of those surveyed indicated an interest in being taxed to do so.

And late last year the City Commission added to the 2020 Plan a goal to "consider the creation of an advisory board to promote the identification, preservation, dedication, acquisition and use of additional public and private open space for Brentwood in a cost-effective manner."

The forum, Prince says, is his organization's way of determining how serious each of the eight City Commission candidates is about preserving open space. During the forum, each candidate will be given the opportunity for opening remarks before answering a series of specific questions from Prince, the forum moderator, about preservation and development. The forum will conclude with audience questions. All discussion will pertain exclusively to green-space issues.

"We want to see which candidates support preservation in Brentwood and which ones don't," Prince said. "We want them to show their true colors."

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