



# PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **LAWSUIT FILED TO PRESERVE PRIME FARMLAND IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY**

### **Santa Barbara County Action Network Challenges Lompoc General Plan Update Opening Door to Large-Scale Urban Development of Prime Agricultural Land on City's Western Boundary**

LOMPOC, CA – On behalf of Santa Barbara County Action Network (SB CAN), nonprofit law firm Environmental Defense Center (EDC) filed a lawsuit in Santa Barbara County Superior Court today, alleging that the City of Lompoc violated the California Environmental Quality Act when it approved the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the City's 2030 General Plan Update. The EIR, and the City's findings on the EIR, support the inclusion of the "Bailey Avenue expansion area" as part of the 2030 General Plan Update. Opposed by both environmental and farming groups, the Bailey Avenue development proposal would transform the 270-acre piece of prime agricultural land into an urbanized development consisting of nearly 2,700 homes and more than 225,000 square feet of commercial space. The Bailey Avenue area lies within some of the most productive agricultural land in the state and is currently farmed largely for lucrative row food crops including broccoli, lettuce, artichokes and celery.

"The City not only ignored long-standing agricultural protection policies in its own General Plan, but also voted against the desire of its citizens who have fought the expansion of the City into this area for more than a decade" stated Joyce Howerton, former Mayor of Lompoc and now Advocacy & Outreach Director for SB CAN.

SB CAN's decision to bring the litigation was driven largely by concerns regarding the future pattern of agricultural land conversion within Santa Barbara County. SB CAN views the City of Lompoc's decision as the most important, precedent-setting annexation ever considered by the City of Lompoc, one that has County-wide implications for the future of agricultural land. The development of Bailey Avenue has long been opposed by many Lompoc residents, and the Lompoc Planning Commission unanimously voted to recommend that it be maintained as an agricultural area. The City's approval is the first step towards ultimate annexation, which also requires approval by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).

“The City violated the law by rejecting an alternative plan that would preserve Bailey Avenue farmland,” said Brian Segee, EDC Staff Attorney representing SB CAN in the case. “As determined by the recent Housing Element update, which is also a part of the City’s 2030 General Plan, the City of Lompoc has sufficient infill vacancies to meet State housing mandates, and development of Bailey Avenue is not needed to meet the City’s projected growth numbers. Instead, the 2030 General Plan would unnecessarily expand the City’s boundaries to outlying areas that currently contain irreplaceable prime farmland.”

SB CAN’s carefully considered decision to initiate this lawsuit is necessary to protect its interest in assuring a lawful General Plan Update under CEQA’s extremely short 30-day statute of limitations, Cal. Code Regs. § 15075(g), while also providing an opportunity to engage in future constructive dialogue and negotiation with the City Council.

Joyce Howerton commented, “SB CAN looks forward to working with the City to ensure compliance with long-standing General Plan policies that protect agricultural land.”

Read the Filed Petition [here](#).

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***Santa Barbara County Action Network*** works to promote social and economic justice, to preserve our environmental and agricultural resources, and to create sustainable communities. SB CAN advocates a holistic approach to community planning that integrates housing, open space, and transportation to meet the needs of all members of our community and future generations. Learn more at [www.sbcan.org](http://www.sbcan.org).

***The Environmental Defense Center***, a non-profit law firm, protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties. Since 1977, EDC has empowered community based organizations to advance environmental protection. Program areas include protecting coast and ocean resources, open spaces and wildlife, and human and environmental health. Learn more about EDC at [www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org](http://www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org).