

# TheGuide

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CUPERTINO  
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## 17 ACRES IN DISPUTE

SANTA CLARA DEBATES FUTURE OF FORMER AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH STATION | PAGE 3



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The Bay Area Research and Extension (BAREC) site is state land that had been used for agricultural testing. It was closed in 2003. Santa Clara has proposed building housing for the elderly on the site. Negotiations with the state for the property are expected to begin in July.

# OPEN-SPACE STATUS SOUGHT FOR 17-ACRE SITE

GROUP TRIES TRY TO BLOCK HOUSING SUGGESTED FOR OLD RESEARCH STATION

By Michael Cronk  
*Mercury News*

## SANTA CLARA

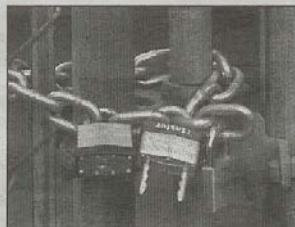
A group of environmentalists and preservationists is continuing its fight to stave off development and keep as agricultural open space a former 17-acre agricultural research station off Winchester Boulevard in Santa Clara.

Meanwhile, the city is considering buying six acres of the one-time Bay Area Research and Extension Center for an affordable senior housing project, and the state is

looking to sell the remaining acreage to a developer.

The property, on Winchester Boulevard across from Westfield Shoppingtown-Valley Fair, is bordered by Santa Clara and San Jose. It closed as an agricultural research center in 2003.

"We're trying to keep a resource that has served the community for 150 years, and



could continue to serve it," said Kirk Vartan, a spokesman for SaveBAREC. "The site would be much more useful than having it developed for housing."

Members are trying to persuade officials in both cities to work together to create a plan

The old research station remains closed. A group called SaveBAREC wants the land to be kept as open space.

to keep the site as open space. In February, the San Jose Parks and Recreation Commission recommended that the city council support efforts to preserve the BAREC site because of its historical significance and potential open space and recreational value. Land use, however, is controlled by the Santa Clara City Council.

Santa Clara officials in

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# BAREC | Conservationists fight housing proposal

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2008 sought to build a 165-unit affordable housing project for the elderly on the site. Negotiations to buy the property from the state were halted in June 2004 when the Legislature passed a bill requiring that surplus property couldn't be sold for less than fair market value. That legislation ends July 1, and the state has told Santa Clara officials it is ready to resume negotiations.

Last year, estimates of fair market value for the property was about \$2 million an acre. The parties involved in the negotiations would not confirm that figure.

SummerHill Homes of Palo Alto is negotiating with the state to purchase 10 acres and build around 110 single-family homes. The remaining acre would be remain open space or be developed as a park.

Pam Morrison, a city administrative analyst, said Santa Clara doesn't have the money in the general fund to buy the land and keep it agricultural. Santa Clara Redevelopment Agency funds can be used to purchase land for af-



Part of the group seeking open-space status for the old BAREC site instead of housing. In back from left, Kirk Vartan and Cameron Colson. In front are Jackie Moore and Kathryn Mathewson.

fordable housing, but not for open space.

"We did contact the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority if they might be interested in the property, and the state did too," Morrison said. "To our knowledge no buyers have stepped forward."

Beyond the budget issue,

she said the city council has set a goal of creating housing on that site. An environmental impact report regarding residential development on the property is being developed.

SaveBAREC has suggested several alternative uses for the property, including a visi-

tor center, an organic food and nutrition program, children's gardening, job training and a soil testing laboratory.

It is also pursuing historic landmark status for the property. In the 19th century, a small wood-frame home in one corner of the property was used by the Women's Re-

lief Corps, which took in widows and orphans of Civil War soldiers.

At the research center, run through the California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources beginning in 1952, scientists worked on various projects including studying ways of controlling Dutch elm disease, developing new types of turf, and conducting cut-flower and vegetable experiments that aided home gardeners.

Kathryn Mathewson, who lives nearby in San Jose, said Santa Clara officials need to consider the importance of the site to residents both inside and outside their city.

"This is really a regional issue. Why put housing, which is all over this valley, on such an historically important piece of land?" she said. "We're prepared to have a referendum if necessary."

## IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

For more information on SaveBAREC, go to [www.savebarec.org](http://www.savebarec.org)

Contact Michael Cronk at [mcronk@mercurynews.com](mailto:mcronk@mercurynews.com) or (408) 920-5063.