

Meadow: If unsold, open space will become home sites

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concerts.

On Saturday, they will gather between 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. to plant crabapple trees and lilacs in the meadow along the West 22nd Avenue right of way.

The event will give residents a "good springboard for our last round of fundraising to purchase the meadow," said Susan Jerde, a longtime area resident and early organizer of the group.

Residents for years have enjoyed the mostly grassy area for walks and blackberry picking, or just to get away from the bustle of urban life. Nature lovers estimate that fruit and nut trees on the property attract 100 species of birds.

Madison Meadow's saga began in late 2003, when the property owner, Eric Frye, put the land up for sale.

Neighbors were worried because Frye had received an offer from someone with plans to build several houses on the property.

But Frye, a New York City resident whose late father had owned the land, was sensitive to the neighbors' concerns about development, said Linda Prier, the earliest Madison Meadow organizer.

Frye agreed to sell the prop-

erty to residents for \$450,000, but only if they raised \$200,000 for a down payment by the end of the year — at that time less than two months away.

While some residents believed that they could have raised the money in time, Prier said, others did not.

Instead, Paul and Stephanie Niedermeyer, who live a half-block from the meadow, bought the land, and took out a mortgage from Frye. The Niedermeyers gave the neighborhood group a year to buy the property from them.

Volunteers worked hard to raise money. With the help of a \$100,000 anonymous donation and several smaller contributions, the group in 2005 paid the Niedermeyers \$216,000, including interest, to buy the land. The group also assumed the Frye mortgage.

Since then, the group has been making interest-only mortgage payments to Frye. They owe Frye a balloon payment to pay off the mortgage at the end of December.

Paul Niedermeyer, a Eugene landlord, said he has the right to buy the property back from the group if it is unable to make the payment. If he acquires the property, Niedermeyer said, he probably would divide the land into eight home lots.

He said half the property, or about 1 acre, would remain open space, while the rest would become houses and yards.

Meanwhile, residents are planning summer concerts, garage sales, a "kids safari" and other fundraising events in the meadow. Madison Meadow T-shirts are for sale for \$15 apiece. The group also may have booths at community events to collect funds.

About 300 donors have contributed so far, with most giving from \$50 to \$500. With time running out, volunteers will contact possible large donors.

The \$100,000 anonymous donation, received via the Oregon Community Foundation, was key to their early success, residents acknowledged, as was an anonymous gift of \$38,500.

Madison Meadow board members have agreed to match donations up to a total of \$30,000, to jump-start fundraising.

"We are pretty determined

to finish the job," Jerde said.

"Our push this year is reaching out to find those large donors who can get us over that final hump."

To make a donation or to learn more: Call 683-3430 or visit www.madisonmeadow.org.