



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-24-19
Meeting 24-04
February 14, 2024

AGENDA ITEM 6

AGENDA ITEM

Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve Public Access via Los Vientos Way

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Approve the creation of a new public access point of entry into Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve at the end of Los Vientos Way in the City of San Carlos and the associated Use and Management Plan Amendment that reflects this decision to allow neighborhood access to the Preserve for hiking and dogs-on-leash uses, as detailed in the staff report.

SUMMARY

The City of San Carlos (City) has requested that the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) open a public trail access point to Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve (Preserve) at the end of Los Vientos Way. Neighborhood trail connections to the Preserve is a component of Vision Plan Priority Action #26. Improvements needed to create a trailhead can be done by District staff and there are sufficient funds in the current fiscal year budget to cover the minor cost of installation.

BACKGROUND

There is currently no public access point at the end of Los Vientos Way to enter the Preserve. Access is blocked by a chain link fence. City staff originally requested that the District consider a public access point at the end of Los Vientos Way into Pulgas Ridge Preserve in 2009. The District reviewed this proposal with the Use and Management Committee (U&M) (currently named the Planning and Natural Resource Committee) in 2010. At that time, there was a mix of public support and opposition to a new trailhead, with many of the immediate neighbors opposing the project, based on concerns about littering, parking and safety. At that time, U&M requested for staff to continue working with the City on issues raised during the U&M meeting.

Access into the Preserve from Los Vientos Way is included the Vision Plan's 54 priority actions. The 2014 Vision Plan was developed through a comprehensive community engagement process and a thorough resource assessment to create a 40-year vision for the future of open space, consisting of priority action portfolios focused on land protection, habitat restoration and low-intensity recreation. Priority Action #26 - *Pulgas Ridge: Regional and Neighborhood Trail Extensions* identifies the following actions: *Collaborate to secure, plan for, and carry out East Ridge Boundary Trail extension to northwest. Develop neighborhood trail connection.*

The City of San Carlos General Plan Parks and Recreation Element identifies the connection from Crestview Drive (via Los Vientos Way) to the Preserve and adjacent San Francisco Public Utilities Commission watershed lands as the #1 priority of all City-listed future trail connections.

Currently, at the end of Los Vientos Way, where the public road ends at the Preserve, there is a vehicle access gate that allows for District maintenance and patrol access, as well as emergency access (refer to [Pulgas Ridge trail map](#)). If approved by the Board of Directors, this gate entrance would include a new public trailhead entrance, with appropriate signage, typical of other neighborhood trailhead entrances. An informal pathway that exists now would serve as the trail connection to the nearby Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail, which is located approximately 630 feet to the west.

DISCUSSION

The City of San Carlos (City) recently contacted the District to restart the process for considering a new public access point at the end of Los Vientos Way for improved neighborhood access to the Preserve. On September 25, 2023, the City Council (San Carlos [agenda](#)) considered whether to permit access across a one-foot no-access easement granted to the City that is located just outside the boundary of the Preserve at the end of Los Vientos Way. The City Council unanimously approved providing public trail access over the easement and requested that the District open the gate to allow public access into the Preserve. The Council's rationale for approving public trail use across the easement centered on the original intent of the easement – which was to prevent vehicular traffic, including a once proposed road connection that would extend Los Vientos Way further west, toward Highway 280.

At the council meeting, most public comments were against the proposal. Comments in opposition were from neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the proposed access entry point. A few commentators supported trail access. At a follow up community meeting, most of the speakers were in favor of trail access, while several neighbors who attended the meeting expressed concerns. Primary concerns raised by neighbors at both meetings were related to criminal activity, fire danger, littering, dog waste, noise, and the lack of restroom facilities. Trail access supporters noted that the entry point would provide a more direct access to the Preserve for the local community, allowing them to walk into the Preserve instead of requiring them to drive to the lower parking area, that it was a great step forward in making a regional trail connection for City residents, and that similar neighborhood access points within the City have not created problems. Additionally, they noted ample roadside parking exists at the Edmonds Road entrance and on Crestview Drive, if parking on Los Vientos Way became an issue.

The City has also expressed interest in pursuing a planned and nearby regional trail, named the East Ridge Boundary Trail, which appears in the [San Mateo County Trails Master Plan](#). This trail connection is envisioned in the City's adopted 2012 Hillside Trails Plan and reflected in the Parks and Recreation Element of the City of San Carlos General Plan. This is also a Vision Plan project that will involve participation by and discussions with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, who is the underlying landowner, San Mateo County Community College District, who maintains the Crystal Springs cross country course and connecting pathways to the north, and San Mateo County Parks, who maintains and manages the connecting Sheep Camp Trail further north that links to trails west of Highway 280. Completion of the planned East Ridge Boundary Trail along with Board approval of the neighborhood public access point to the Preserve via Los Vientos Way would accomplish Vision Plan Priority Action #26. Staff will

consider adding the East Ridge Boundary Trail project to a future Capital Improvement and Action Plan for Board consideration based on available District staff and partner capacity.

The City Council's decision to permit public trail access across their easement to facilitate the Los Vientos Way neighborhood entry point balances the desires of their constituents' interests in improved neighborhood access and the immediate neighbors' concerns. The City has agreed to service and maintain a dog waste container and manage any parking or other issues on Los Vientos Way. Fire risk is a concern for residents of the Los Vientos Way neighborhood as their houses are at the top of a steep hillside above the Preserve. The District has completed a major Wildland Fire Resiliency project below those homes, and annual vegetation clearing permits are available to residents to clear vegetation on District land within 100 feet of an occupied structure for defensible space via the District's [defensible space permit program](#). Additionally, smoking and fires are prohibited in the Preserve. Neighbors noted that they had reported smoking and fireworks activity at the nearby Crestview Park. In general, these types of activity are more common in locations where you can view city lights, which are not visible from the Preserve. The District would also provide contact information for neighbors to report these types of activities. Response to these reports would be coordinated with the San Mateo Sheriff Department depending on the type of activity.

A new public access point at the end of Los Vientos Way would not require new trail construction. It would require installation of a standard vehicle gate, entrance stile, and signage. The existing pathway is sufficient to provide a connection from Los Vientos Way to the Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail. Given the short distance the connecting pathway, the General Manager does not recommend naming the trail.

Use and Management Plan Amendment

The District purchased the former Benedetti property that borders Los Vientos Way in 2000. At the time, the Preliminary Use and Management Plan designated the property as an addition to the Preserve and established the parcel as a Conservation Management Unit (CMU) to indicate that the site would remain closed to public access until further planning. In 2003, the Board adopted a new Use and Management Plan for the Preserve to open new areas to public access, expand the trail system, and improve parking, thereby removing the prior CMU designation. These actions included the approval of three new trails - the Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail (referred to previously as the Ridgetop Trail), Dick Bishop Trail (referred to previously as the South Canyon Trail) and Cordilleras Connector Trail; a new parking lot on Edmunds Road; and expansion of the off-leash dog area.

To formalize the recommended addition of a new public access entry point to the Preserve, the General Manager recommends amending the Use and Management Plan by adding the following language:

Public Access: Establish a public access point at Los Vientos Way and designate uses on the trail between Los Vientos Way and the Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail as open to hiking and dogs on-leash, consistent with trail uses allowed on the remaining Preserve trails.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are sufficient funds in the adopted FY24 budget to cover the minor cost of the recommended actions. This work is not funded by Measure AA.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- **April 12, 2000:** Board Addition of Benedetti property to Pulgas Ridge and Adoption of Preliminary Use and Management Plan ([R-00-46](#), [minutes](#))
- **August 13, 2003:** Board Tentative Adoption of the Use and Management plan including construction of “Ridgetop” trail (Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail) ([R-03-74](#), [minutes](#))
- **September 24, 2003:** Board Final Adoption of Amendment to Use and Management Plan ([R-03-86](#), [minutes](#))
- **December 16, 2009:** Board [FYI](#) San Carlos Pulgas Ridge Access Proposal
- **September 28, 2010:** Use and Management Committee Consideration of designation of new public access to Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve. ([report](#), [minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Notice was provided to neighbors in the Los Vientos Way neighborhood, to the interested parties list for Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve and to the City for distribution.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Replacement of the existing chain-link fence and gate with a standard District pipe gate and pedestrian entrance stile, and installation of trailhead signage at the terminus of Los Vientos Way, San Carlos is exempt in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 1301, Existing Conditions, and Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land. Pursuant to Section 15168 of the CEQA Guidelines, maintenance of the existing connecting trail from the proposed trail head at Los Vientos Way to the Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail in Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve is consistent with activities covered under the District’s Integrated Pest Management Program, and Final Environmental Impact Report to the Integrated Pest Management Program, adopted by Board Resolution No. 14-37 on December 10, 2014.

NEXT STEPS

If approved by the Board, the General Manager will direct staff to remove the existing chain-link fence and gate and replace them with a standard District pipe gate and trailhead. The trail would be added to the Preserve map. The General Manager will also work with staff to consider the timing for the future East Ridge Boundary Trail.

Attachments

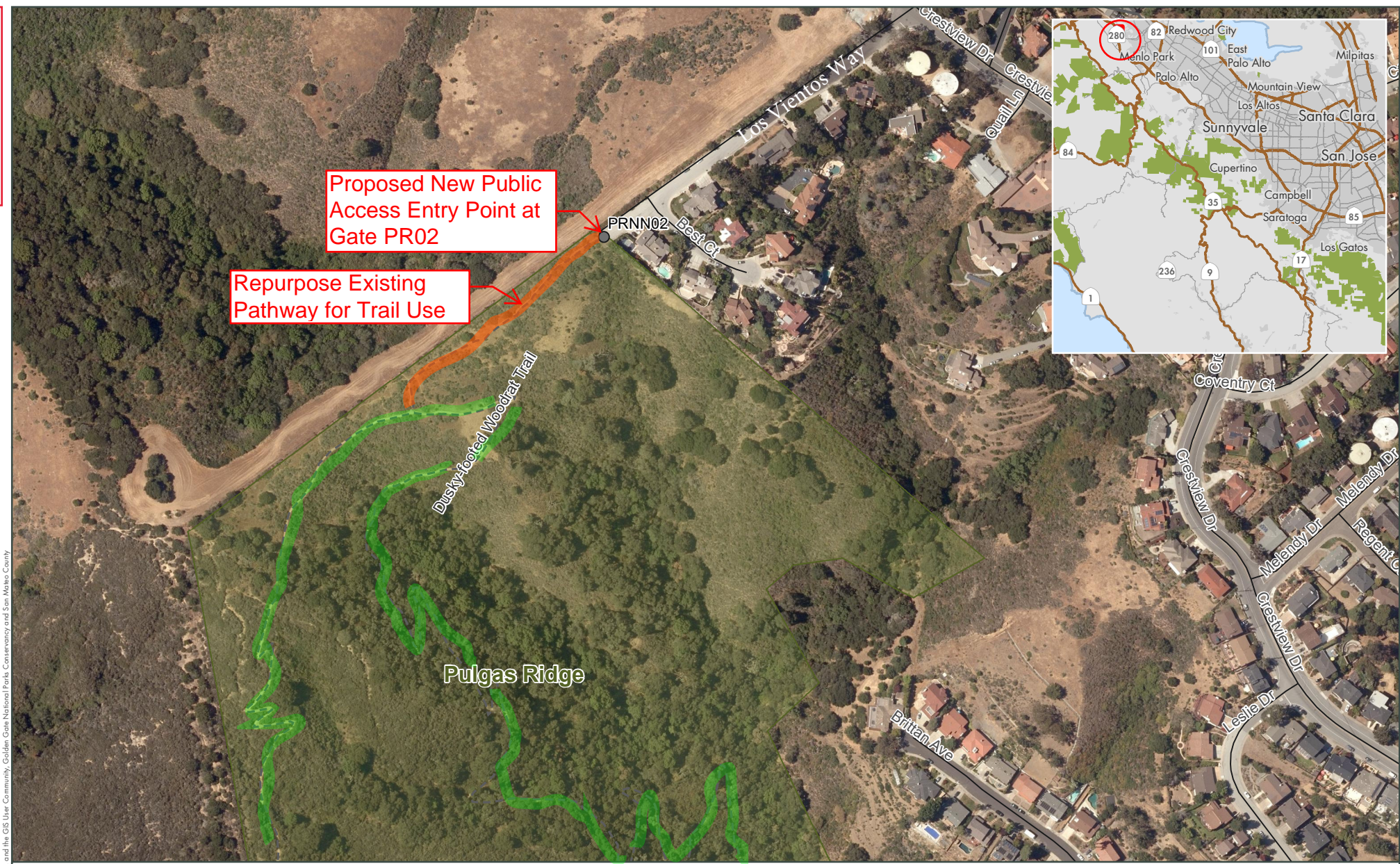
1. Map of proposed public access and trail
2. Letter from the city of San Carlos to the District requesting public access

Responsible Department Head:

Ana Maria Ruiz, General Manager

Prepared by / Contact person:

Brian Malone, Assistant General Manager, Office of the General Manager



Pulgas Ridge OSP Los Vientos Way Access

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Gate | Road Centerline (minor) |
| ● Present | — Road |
| Trail (classes) | ■ Preserve Boundary (fill) |
| — Unpaved Seasonal Road | |
| --- Trail | |

ATTACHMENT 1

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(MROSD)
9/18/2023



Data Source(s): Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community, Golden Gate National Parks, Conservancy and San Mateo County

B. Malone While the District strives to use the best available digital data, these data do not represent a legal survey and are merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.

CITY OF SAN CARLOS
CITY COUNCIL



600 ELM STREET
SAN CARLOS, CA 94070
(650) 802-4219
CITYOFSANCARLOS.ORG

October 2, 2023

Brian Malone
Assistant General Manager
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
5050 El Camino Real
Los Altos, CA 94022

RE: Trail Access Point at Los Vientos Way

Dear Mr. Malone,

Attached please find City Council Resolution 2023-117, adopted by the City Council by a 5-0 vote on September 25, 2023. This resolution indicates that the City of San Carlos affirms the public use of the one-foot non-access easement located at the end of Los Vientos Way for pedestrian and hiking purposes. Although the City realizes the decision to open the gate at the end of Los Vientos Way is at the discretion of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, we adopted this resolution in support of a public trail access point at this location, if and when the gate is opened.

As the unanimous vote shows, the City is eager for the expansion of trails as well as access to regional trail connections such as the one at Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve. Trail improvements, expansion and access have been a priority of San Carlos residents for decades. When the San Carlos Parks Master Plan community survey was completed in 2008, 76% of respondents were interested in expanding and improving the City's trail system and trails were the highest-ranking recreation amenity of those surveyed. Many former San Carlos councilmembers and trail community members have supported the expansion of trails and trail access, and the current Council is excited for the possibility of a new access point at Los Vientos Way.

In early 2023, the City Council added several recreation goals and objectives to its Strategic Plan. One of those objectives is "to assess new and existing opportunities to expand trails and trail connections with adjacent open space." We believe adoption of this resolution is an important step towards this goal in our community.

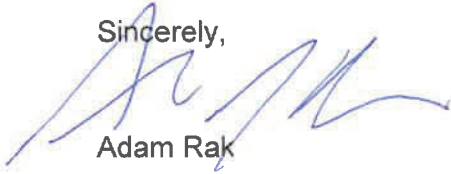
There are many benefits to trails in a community, including economic, environmental and health benefits. Moreover, trails in communities have been found to increase property values by as much as 10%¹. Additionally, the top four suburban communities rated in *Sunset*, February 2007, have master plans for significant open space and miles of multi-use trails. Environmental benefits include preservation of wildlife habitat as well as neighborhood trail access points reducing traffic and greenhouse gases. Lastly, the benefits of trails related to personal health and quality of life are abundant. Access to trails promotes and encourages more physical activity, appreciation of the outdoors, builds community by providing a place for neighbors to meet on the trails while non-profits and businesses engage in community service projects in parks.

The City of San Carlos is committed to increasing access and expanding our trail system and looks forward to future conversations with Midpeninsula and discussions about how we can support this anticipated access point into Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve. The City is

committed to the purchase/installation and services for waste receptacles, dog waste bags, garbage pickup and signage. We are also able to have staff (and possibly the City Council Trails Subcommittee) attend the Midpeninsula District Board meeting where this neighborhood access for hiking will be considered and will be available to answer any questions and/or discuss any specific requests.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to working together!

Sincerely,



Adam Rak

Mayor, City of San Carlos

¹ *National Recreation and Park Association, "Measuring the Impact of Parks on Property Values"*
by Sarah Nicholls, Ph.D.

RESOLUTION NO. 2023 – 117

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN CARLOS
FINDING THAT HIKING AND PEDESTRIAN USE OF THE ONE-FOOT-WIDE NON-ACCESS
STRIP AND EASEMENT LOCATED AT THE END OF LOS VIENTOS WAY DEDICATED TO
AND ACCEPTED BY THE CITY OF SAN CARLOS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE
PUBLIC USE GRANTED.**

WHEREAS, Los Vientos Way is a public street in the City of San Carlos. At the end of the street is a one-foot-wide non-access strip, also identified as an easement on both the parcel map and the subdivision map (the "Easement"), that was granted to the City of San Carlos for "public use" as part of the subdivision; and

WHEREAS, the Easement was recorded as part of a new parcel map in 1979 and further accepted by action of the City Council when the subdivision map was approved on February 10, 1986; and

WHEREAS, the history of development in this area of San Carlos strongly suggests that the Easement was granted to San Carlos to prevent a vehicular roadway extension from Los Vientos Way to Hassler Road across adjacent private property that existed at the time. Eleven years earlier, a similar one-foot-wide non-access "strip" was created at the location where Hallmark Drive in Belmont touches Crestview Drive in San Carlos to prevent through vehicular traffic between Belmont and San Carlos related to developments approved around 1975. This non-access strip at the San Carlos and Belmont border has continuously allowed pedestrian, cyclist, and emergency vehicular access, but does not provide for through vehicular traffic. The one-foot width of the Easement is identical to the Crestview/Hallmark strip. There is no reason to believe that the Easement was intended prevent pedestrians and hikers or to be treated any differently than the non-access strip at Hallmark Drive and Crestview Drive, which is only about a mile away; and

WHEREAS, in 1983, the land on the south side of the Easement became part of the Midpeninsula Open Space District ("Midpen") as the Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve (the "Preserve"). As a result, no public vehicular roadway will ever be constructed from Los Vientos Way into the Preserve; and

WHEREAS, this project was found to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), under Section 15301, Existing Facilities as the project does not propose new development and no construction or earth disturbing activities are proposed. The project does not propose new street parking. Opening of the gate and the addition of signage, garbage cans, and dog waste bags are considered minor alterations to an existing facility. A Certificate of Exemption has been filed with the project; and

WHEREAS, since San Carlos accepted the easement on September 24, 1979 and again on February 10, 1986, access to the Preserve at the end of Los Vientos Way has been through a gate, first by the former property owner and then by Midpen. Even though Midpen has restricted public access through the gate over the years, San Carlos has never interpreted the Easement to prevent access by the employees of Midpen or, by extension, potential recreational users of the district lands should Midpen open the gate for public access.

WHEREAS, the Preserve is located in the City of San Carlos Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) sphere of influence; and

WHEREAS, after acquisition of the property, Midpen constructed the Dusky Footed Woodrat trail which is approximately 175 meters from the existing gate. An existing path connects the gate to the trail. An access point to the Dusky Footed Woodrat Trail from the existing gate is consistent with the goals and mission of Midpen and the General Plan of San Carlos. The Park and Recreation Element of the City of San Carlos identifies this location as a potential trail connection; and

WHEREAS, the San Carlos General Plan has several policies and actions related to the establishment of trails and regional trail connections:

- Action PR-1.7: Investigate acquisition of open space lands or easements to expand trail network, especially in areas adjacent to existing open space.
- Policy PR-2.3: Continue to support implementation of trail connections as identified in the City's Master Plan for Parks, Open Space, Buildings and other Recreation facilities.
- Policy PR-2.4: Continue to maintain City-owned open space trails and connections to regional trails.
- Policy PR-2.5: Promote the development of publicly-accessible urban trails throughout the city to provide access to the natural environment and facilitate non-motorized transportation options; and

WHEREAS, the Los Vientos Way access location was identified as a top priority in the San Carlos Potential Trail Connections Plan which was revised in 2011, as it eases access between a future Devonshire Canyon trail system and Pulgas Ridge Open Space; and

WHEREAS, opening of the existing gate by Midpen will provide convenient neighborhood access to the upper portions of the Preserve, especially to those physically unable to reach this area from Edmonds Road; and

WHEREAS, the area between the Preserve, Belmont's trail system, and San Mateo County's Sheep Camp Trail is a missing link in a larger regional trail system. The San Mateo County Master Trail Plan has for decades included a proposed eastern boundary trail, which the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission concurs is consistent with their recreational use plans; and

WHEREAS, the City has trail easements along the eastern side of Crestview Drive via Vista Park and other lands that will also provide a link for pedestrian and hiking access to the Preserve; and

WHEREAS, trail access across the Easement would be a first step to provide access from the Preserve to the many regional trails in the area, other City trails and the future eastern boundary trail. Until the eastern boundary trail is established, trail users will use Crestview Drive to connect to Belmont's system and Sheep Camp Trail via Hallmark Drive.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FOUND, DETERMINED AND RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL THAT:

- a. The above recitals are incorporated by this reference; and

- b. This project has been found to be Categorically Exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Section 15301, Existing Facilities. A categorical exemption is on file; and
- c. Pedestrian and hiking uses over and across the Easement are consistent with the purposes of the dedication for public purposes to the City; and
- d. A pedestrian and hiking access point into the Preserve over and across the Easement would provide San Carlos residents and the neighborhood with convenient access to the Preserve and provide connections with other regional trails; and
- e. A pedestrian and hiking access point into the Preserve over and across the Easement is consistent with and will implement the Park and Recreation Element of the San Carlos General Plan; and
- f. The opening of the gate by Midpen for access into the Preserve over and across the Easement is also consistent the Park and Recreation Element of the San Carlos General Plan.

I, City Clerk Crystal Mui, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was duly and regularly passed and adopted by the City Council of the City of San Carlos at a scheduled meeting thereof held on the 25th day of September 2023, by the following vote:

AYES, COUNCILMEMBERS: MCDOWELL, VENKATESH, DUGAN, COLLINS, RAK

NOES, COUNCILMEMBERS: NONE

ABSENT, COUNCILMEMBERS: NONE


 CITY CLERK of the City of San Carlos

APPROVED:

 MAYOR of the City of San Carlos