



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-10-152
Meeting 10-38
December 9, 2010

AGENDA ITEM 1

AGENDA ITEM

Acceptance of the Draft Mount Umunhum Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan as the Project Description for Subsequent Environmental Review; Direction to Begin the Environmental Review Process Pursuant to CEQA and Applicable Environmental Review Requirements for the Project; Direction to Study the Suitability, Costs, Potential Revenue, and Public Sentiment of Charging Fees to Access the Site.

AD HOC COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Accept a presentation on the draft Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan as the proposed Project Description for the environmental review process required by the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and other applicable environmental review requirements.
2. Receive public comment on the proposed Project Description.
3. Provide staff with any additional direction regarding the draft Mount Umunhum Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan and accept this draft Plan as the Project Description for subsequent environmental review under CEQA and other applicable environmental review requirements.
4. Direct staff to begin the required environmental review process.
5. Direct staff to study the suitability, costs, potential revenue, and public sentiment of charging a fee to access the Mount Umunhum site as a source of funding to help offset operating and/or capital costs such road maintenance.

SUMMARY

The Sierra Azul and Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee recommends moving forward with the next phase of the proposed project for environmental restoration and public access at Mount Umunhum: analysis of the project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). To initiate this process, the Board of Directors will receive a project team presentation on the status of the proposed project, and accept the Draft Mount Umunhum

Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan (Plan) as the proposed Project and CEQA Project Description. The Draft Plan includes a broader range of project elements that will ultimately be included in the Final Plan, for the purposes of a robust environmental review process. The Board is expected to consider additional public comment prior to accepting the Project Description and will then consider directing staff to begin the environmental review process and fee suitability study.

DISCUSSION

The Project was initiated in January 2010 with the goal of defining the future of this landmark site. District Staff, with the assistance of consulting landscape architects Restoration Design Group (RDG), implemented a lengthy planning process including:

1. Obtaining input from Operations staff regarding site access, management, and maintenance considerations;
2. Obtaining input from nearly thirty stakeholder groups, including Native Americans, Air Force veterans, neighbors, hiking, bicycling, hang gliding, and equestrian groups, dog owners, historical societies, bird watchers, and local community groups, regarding desired access, facilities, and potential concerns;
3. Creation of three site restoration and access Themes, ranging from minimal access and development to a “destination” level of development, based on staff and stakeholder feedback. Following Committee review, the Themes were presented at a Public Workshop in Los Gatos on September 30, 2010, and posted on the District website. Nearly 350 people attended the Public Workshop, providing ample feedback both at the Workshop and via email comments or comment card. Additional feedback on the Themes was generated by a web-based survey.
4. Development of a Vision for Public Access for the site incorporating public and staff input. This Vision was shared with Operations staff and the Committee for further refinement, prior to presenting it to the public at an Open House at the District Administrative Office on November 18, 2010.
5. Development of a Draft Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan based on public input received at the November 18th Open House and web-based survey. The Draft Plan was presented to the Committee for review and support as the proposed Project and Project Description for subsequent environmental review.

At the Special Meeting of December 9, 2010, the Board will review and consider the draft Mount Umunhum Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan as the proposed Project Description for subsequent environmental review (see Attachment 1). It is important to note that the final Plan may be further refined or modified, based on a variety of factors, including the findings of the environmental review process, fiscal analysis, and other pertinent factors. By approving the Project Description, the Board is not approving a project nor approving the draft Plan as the ultimate site plan for public access to Mount Umunhum. Instead, the Board is approving the range of project elements that may be included in the final Plan and thus the elements that should be reviewed and analyzed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other environmental laws. Final Board approval of a project developed from the

Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan is expected in the spring of 2011, after the environmental review process is complete.

At the Special Meeting of December 9, 2010, the Board will also be asked to consider directing staff to study the suitability, costs, potential revenue, and public sentiment for charging a fee to access the Mount Umunhum Site. To help offset long-term operating and/or capital costs associated with implementation of a final Plan for Mount Umunhum, such as ongoing maintenance of a five mile road, the Committee identified a fee collection system as one potential funding source. Recognizing that this idea is a change from District practice, the Committee has asked that the matter be considered by the full Board, to determine whether staff should proceed with such a study. By giving such direction, the Board is not approving a fee collection system; instead the Board is merely directing staff to proceed with a study. Any decision on implementing a fee collection system would occur at a public meeting after the results of the study are completed.

FISCAL IMPACT

Consideration of public comment, approval of a Project Description for purposes of initiating an environmental review process, and direction to proceed with a fee collection study will not result in any direct or immediate fiscal impacts. The Board approved a contract with Ascent Environmental in July 2010 to assist the District with completing the environmental review process (refer to Board Report R-10-74). Implementation of a Final Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan, if approved by the Board, will require the allocation of additional District resources and expenditure of funds. A preliminary implementation timeline and budget for the draft Plan was presented at the November 18th Open House, and is included with this report (see Attachment 2). The District would need to secure additional long-term funding sources for future implementation if the Board were to approve the project.

PUBLIC NOTICE AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Interested parties and adjacent neighbors and all who are on the Sierra Azul and Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan mailing list were notified of this item.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This meeting is for the Board to receive public comment and approve a Project Description for purposes of initiating the Environmental Review Process pursuant to CEQA and other environmental review laws.

NEXT STEPS

Upon Board approval of the Project Description for the Mount Umunhum Site Planning Project, staff will proceed with completing any required environmental review and public review process in accordance with CEQA and other environmental review requirements. A public hearing will be scheduled as part of this process for the Board to consider additional public comments, consideration of approval of environmental review documents, and consideration of final approval of the Mount Umunhum Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan. Upon

Board concurrence on studying a fee collection system, staff will proceed with conducting relevant research on suitability, costs, potential revenue, and public sentiment.

Attachments:

1. Proposed Project Description
2. Preliminary Implementation Timeline and Budget

Prepared by:

Meredith Manning, Senior Planner

Contact person:

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INTRODUCTION

Mount Umunhum is one of the highest peaks in the Santa Cruz Mountains and forms the scenic backdrop to San Jose and Los Gatos (see Exhibit 1, Regional Map). Its massive “cube”, the concrete base for a cold war-era radar dish, is a local landmark visible for miles. Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD, District) is planning to provide public access to the former Almaden Air Force Station (AFS) and its spectacular panoramic vistas, located atop Mount Umunhum and nearby Mount Thayer. Environmental restoration actions to re-establish natural topography and vegetation at the former AFS are a key component of opening the site to public use.

This Draft Environmental Restoration and Public Access Plan (Plan) is the result of the extensive and ongoing public planning process, guided by the Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Ad Hoc Committee. It describes how visitors will access and enjoy Mount Umunhum, which has been closed to the public for 24 years due to the presence of hazardous materials on the former AFS. A final plan will be presented to the District’s Board of Directors for approval after completion of an environmental review and when all prerequisites for project consideration and approval have been completed. The environmental review process will include ongoing public participation to help shape the final plan.

PROJECT LOCATION

The project site is located within the Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve on the summits of Mount Umunhum and Mount Thayer, in the southern Santa Cruz Mountains, about 13 miles south of San Jose and three miles southeast of Los Gatos (see Exhibit 2, Site Map). Mount Umunhum, at 3,486 feet in elevation, is situated approximately 50 miles due south of Mt. Diablo (3,849 feet). Views from Mount Umunhum encompass the entire south bay area to San Francisco and beyond to the north, and Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz, and the Pacific Ocean to the west, south, and east.

Two separate areas, as well as several road and trail alignments, comprise the project site: the approximately 20-acre “Main Installation” and “Family Housing Area” atop Mount Umunhum, and the three-acre “Ground Air Transmitter Receiver” site on the summit of Mount Thayer. Both summits are highly visible from the Santa Clara Valley. The mountaintops are connected by a road passing through private property. Mount Umunhum is entirely surrounded by private land, while Mount Thayer abuts District land to the south.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The mountainous terrain that makes up the Mount Umunhum site has a long and varied history. Although specific early-history references to the site have not been found, it is well documented that the region figured strongly in the lives of the indigenous peoples who resided in the Santa Cruz Mountain and coastal areas and the Santa Clara Valley. Mount Umunhum must certainly have been part of the world view of many generations of ancestral Native Americans, and this is indeed reflected in the very name of the mountain. The word *Ummun* in the Ohlone dialect translated to

Attachment 1

"hummingbird," a creature that figured in their creation story that took place on a mountain top.

In the late 1950s, the United States government procured Mount Umunhum and the nearby Mount Thayer to build the Almaden Air Force Station, a US Air Force early warning radar base that operated from 1958 to 1980. It was constructed as part of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) to keep watch over northern California's airspace during the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, and as a result of advancements in satellite technology, the need to staff and operate the early warning bases became obsolete. The official "inactivation" date of the facility was June 30, 1980. In June 1982, control of the property and improvements was transferred to the General Services Administration (GSA). The District purchased the 44-acre base in April 1986 from the GSA for then fair market value of \$260,000.

The District acquired the former Almaden AFS and all remaining facilities at the site with the ultimate intent to restore the area to a natural condition and provide public access. While a portion of hazardous materials were cleaned up by the federal government, other materials fell outside the federal cleanup program in which it was placed. The District has recently been working with community, state, and federal leaders to obtain federal funding to complete the cleanup, which is now scheduled to be complete by summer 2011.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The project site consists of a complex of former military buildings and associated facilities (including driveways, parking lots, storage buildings, as well as other base structures and technical facilities). Among these is a large concrete structure (known as "the cube"), formerly used as a podium supporting an 85-ton radar dish. The dish was removed before the District purchased the property. The buildings have been abandoned for 30 years and over time, due to the passage of time, vandalism and extreme weather conditions, are severely dilapidated. Ornamental landscaping species have become established and the main access road, interior roads, parking lots and infrastructure have deteriorated. The main access road, Mt. Umunhum Road, begins at Hicks Road and continues for five miles to the entrance of the former Almaden AFS near the summit. The road is held in various ownerships and exists in various states of disrepair. Obtaining public easement rights or ownership of the road is a prerequisite to allowing full public access. Potential multi-use trail connections could link existing trails to the summit and are part of the proposed plan for public access.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the proposed Plan is to establish a fiscally sustainable visitor destination that balances public access, enjoyment, and education with environmental restoration. This goal aligns with two directives of the District's Mission: to protect and restore the natural environment, and to provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. This goal will be achieved through the following objectives:

- Create a destination that is accessible to and accommodates a broad range of user groups and introduces new visitors to open space.

Attachment 1

- Remove or permanently cap physical hazards and restore the native landscape and habitat for wildlife as much as possible.
- Provide minimal visitor amenities that complement and highlight the world-class views and open space experience.
- Provide ample, rich, and diverse trail experiences for hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.
- Highlight the rich natural and cultural history of the site through self-discovery and focused interpretive and educational opportunities.

SITE ELEMENTS

Facilities, trails, and access features (see Exhibit 3, Concept Plan) will be designed to help create memorable Mount Umunhum experiences for visitors. While the full range of opportunities for public enjoyment at Mount Umunhum are described in this section, individual components will be phased in as feasible, and as funding, property ownership and other constraints allow. The proposed plan will be comprised of elements that meet the objectives described above, and will be designed to accommodate hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, hang gliders, and vehicles at or near the summit.

Mount Umunhum Road will provide paved, two-lane, five-mile vehicular access from the intersection of Hicks Road at the Jacques Ridge parking lot. An electric gate will be installed at Jacques Ridge and an “iron ranger” fee collection system may be located either at this gate or at the summit parking area.

Easy-access or ADA accessibility will be provided. Paved roads, unpaved trails, and viewpoints will provide diverse destination points for social interactions and quiet solitude. Interpretation of recent and historic cultural activity and ecology will be emphasized via self-guided interpretive trails, signs, and/or cellular phone audio tours. Special permitted activities (such as geocaching, and night activities such as astronomy) and docent-led tours will be offered similar to those at other Open Space Preserves, and will be phased in as funding allows.

The proposed plan for Mount Umunhum will restore the elevational summit as close as practical to original, pre-construction topography and improve the habitat with native plants. ADA-accessible trails will lead to seating oriented to views among this environmental restoration. A viewpoint/ceremonial space marked with the four cardinal directions will provide a peaceful place for contemplation. Adjacent to the peak, a summit court is expected to provide paved passenger and emergency vehicle turnaround, ADA-accessible parking and seating, and the sealed radar tower or tower foundation may provide an opportunity for interpretation of military history. An ADA-accessible/service vehicle ramp will connect the summit court with the restored summit. A second ADA-accessible interpretive trail and second viewpoint/ceremonial space will emphasize views as well as the site’s natural and Native American and military cultural history. A multi-use trail network will guide visitors around the site separately from vehicles and connect to regional trails. A summit stairway will connect the upper parking area to the restored summit.

The radar tower will either remain (once structurally repaired), be mostly removed, leaving the foundation of the former tower as a monument, or removed entirely. If the tower remains, it will be permanently sealed to prevent all access to the interior; if

Attachment 1

partially removed, the remaining concrete walls will be neatly sawcut and, depending on their height, provide seating, frame views, or shelter visitors from sun and wind. If the tower is completely removed, only the subsurface foundation would remain, the original elevations would be restored, and habitat improved with native plants.

A range of potential minimal amenities will include two permanent, paved-surface and one temporary/overflow gravel-surfaced parking areas, seating, picnic tables, vault toilets, hitching posts, bicycle racks, non-potable water for dogs, horses, and fire protection (contained in an onsite large-capacity water tank) a dedicated 911 callbox, and a landing zone for emergency aircraft. Additional secondary amenities such as wind and shade protection, rustic backpack camp with ADA-accessible sites, an interpretive center, and increased trail connections, including those to Mount Thayer, towards the Lexington Basin, and connection to the existing Woods Trail (part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail) may be phased in over time as funding, property ownership and other constraints allow.

PUBLIC ACCESS PHASING

Public access to Mount Umunhum may be phased in conjunction with individual site elements. This phasing scheme was developed in response to stakeholder, staff, and general public input, and provides access to the summit as quickly as possible while simultaneously allowing deliberative and sustainable site development.

Special docent-led shuttle tours may bring participants to the summit in passenger vehicles following remediation of hazardous materials; hiking, biking, equestrian use, hang gliding and permit parking may begin following safety upgrades to Mt. Umunhum Road, the main access to the summit; full vehicle access may begin following resurfacing of Mt. Umunhum Road.

STAFFING

The plan will allow phasing of design elements as funding and staffing allows; in its current iteration, it is estimated to require additional staff to carry out the design elements as described. One additional administrative staff is estimated to be necessary to perform increased workload to manage docents, permitting, and volunteer activities, and two additional ranger and one maintenance field staff are estimated to be necessary to add patrol and maintenance needs for this site to the existing requirements of the surrounding preserve.

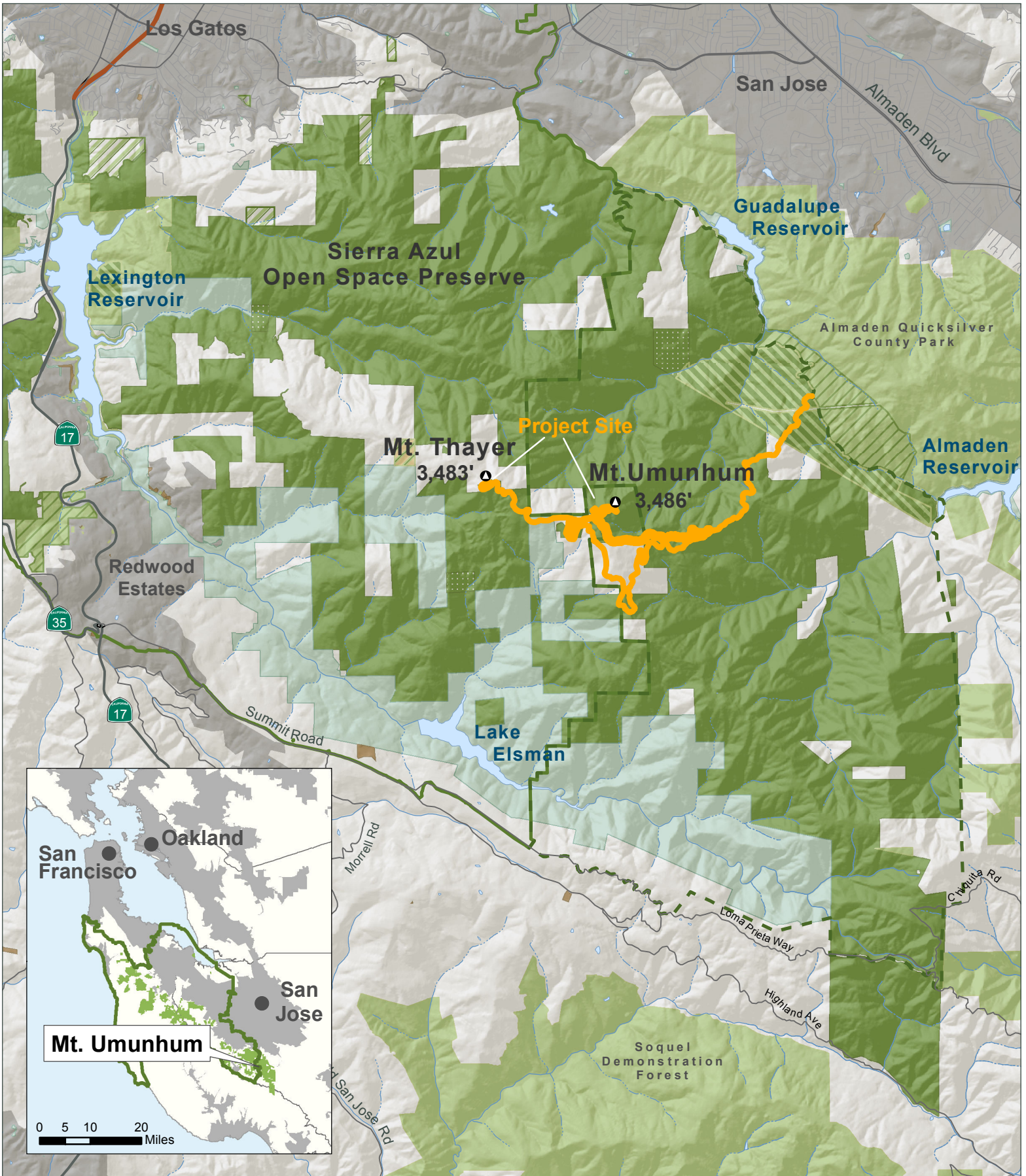








Exhibit 1: Regional Map

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
|  MROSD |  Watershed Land |  Project Site, 234 Acres |
|  Other Protected Open Space or Park Lands |  Conservation or Agricultural Easement |  Private Land |
|  Nonprofit Land |  Other Public Agency |  MROSD Boundary |
| | |  MROSD Sphere of Influence |

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

November 2010



0 0.5 1
Miles



Path: G:\Projects\Sierra_Azul\Mt_Umunhum_AFS\Site_Planning_Project\Buffers\RegionalMapBuffers_11_10.mxd

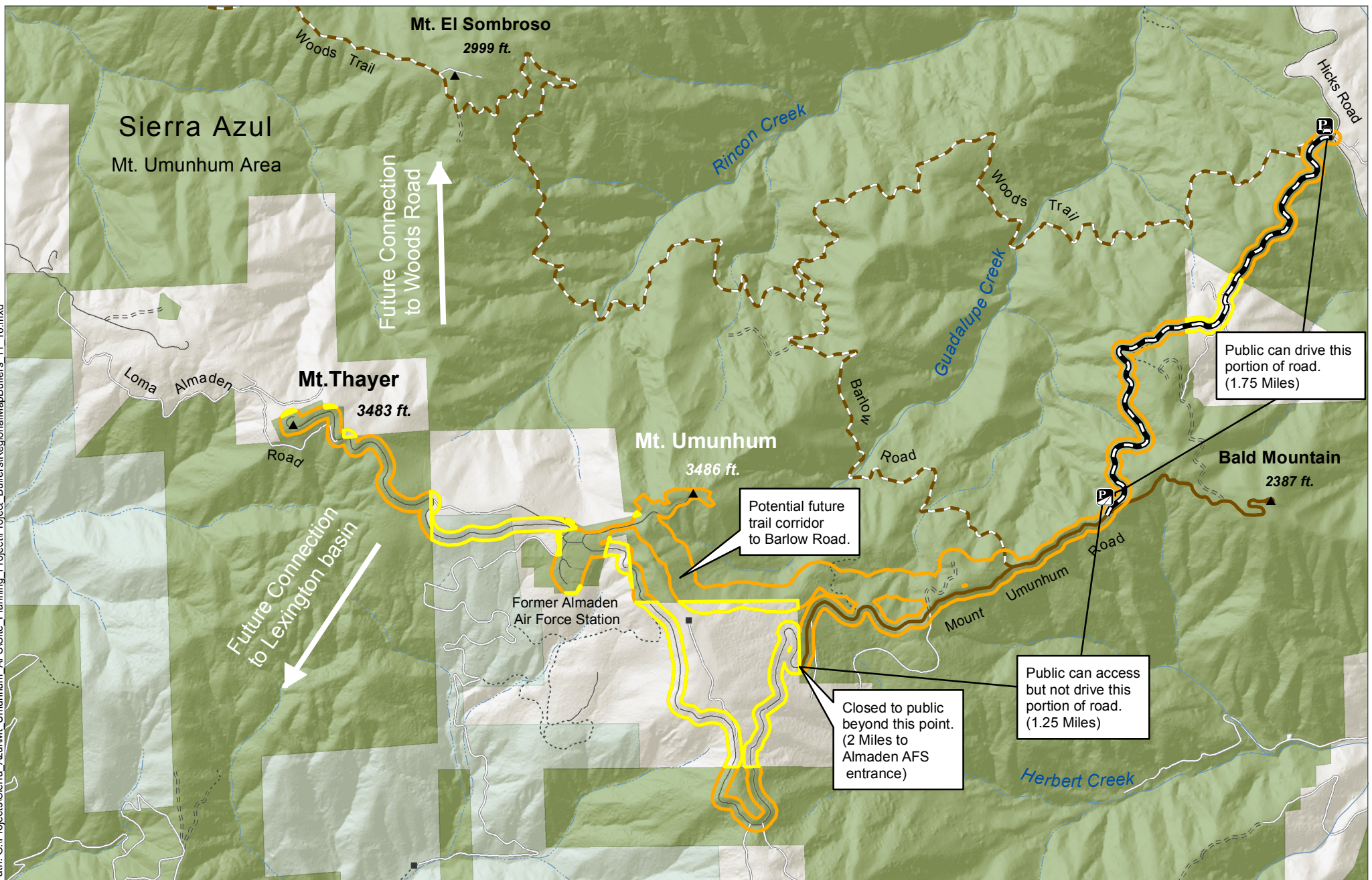


Exhibit 2: Site Map

Land Ownership

- MROSD
- Private Land
- Watershed Land

Current Public Access

- Hiking, Bicycling
- Hiking, Bicycling, Equestrian
- Hiking, Bicycling, Vehicle Access

Study Area for Environmental Review

- Project Buffer (MROSD)
- Project Buffer (Private Land)

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

December 2010



0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles



MOUNT UMUNHUM ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS PLAN

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

CONCEPT PLAN



Potential Trail To Mount Thayer, Lexington Basin and Woods Trail

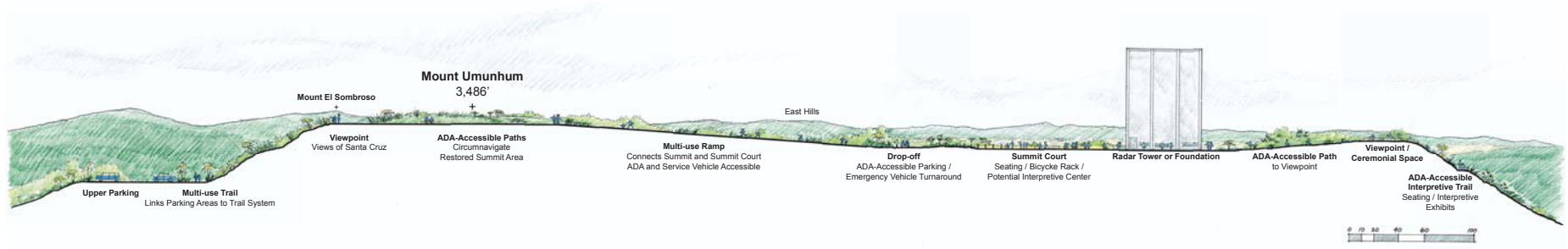
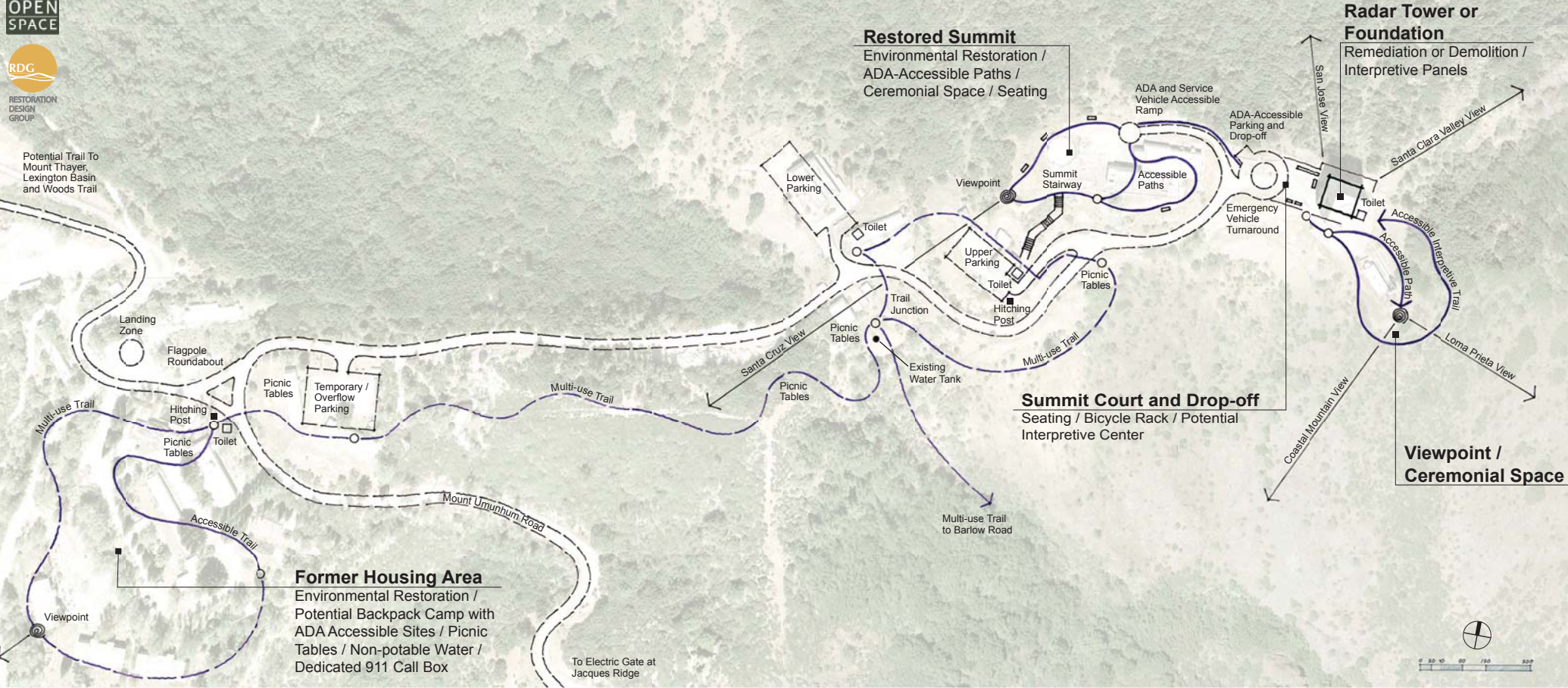


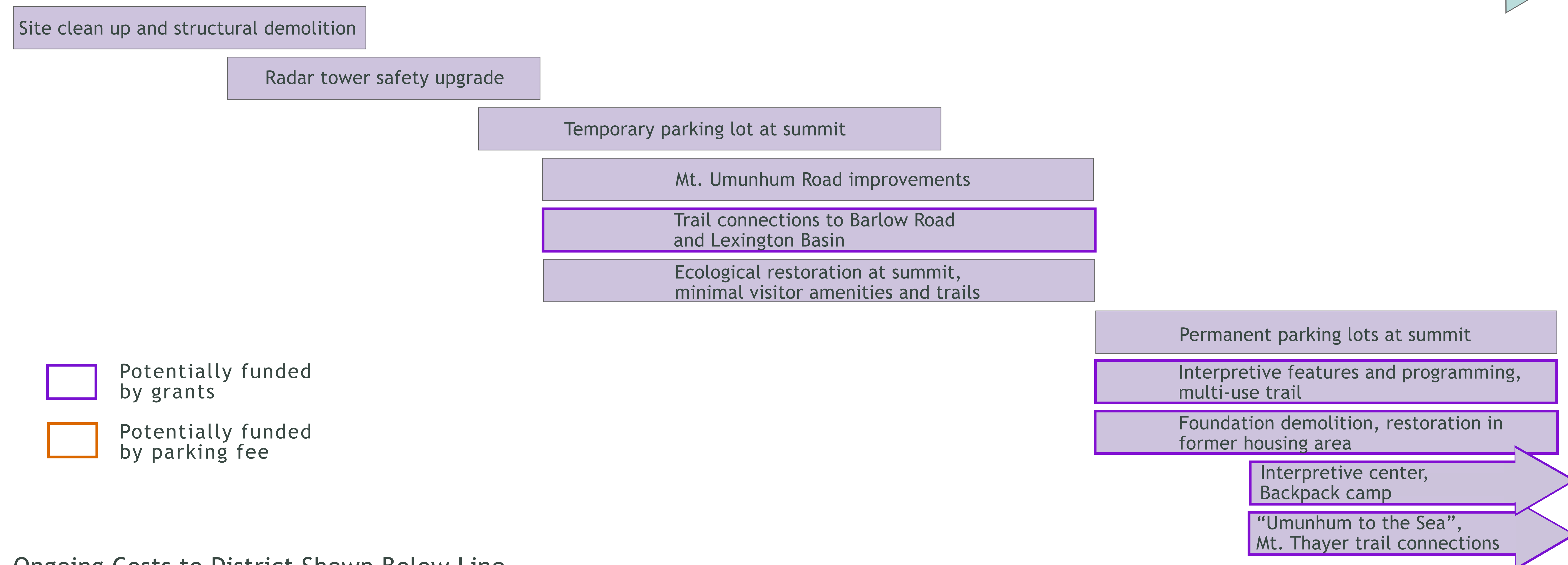
Exhibit 3: Concept Plan



2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	PHASE 1 CLEAN UP		PHASE 2 RESTORATION AND ACCESS			PHASE 3 FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT			
\$3.2M	\$2.0M		\$5.8M			\$2.1M			

Total Project Cost \$13.1M
\$9.9M (Unsecured)
\$3.2M (Secured)

PROJECT PLANNING, DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION DOCS, AND PERMITTING



- Potentially funded by grants
- Potentially funded by parking fee

Ongoing Costs to District Shown Below Line

