



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-25-157
Meeting 25-32
December 10, 2025

SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA ITEM 1

AGENDA ITEM

Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Select one of two options forwarded by the 2025 Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee as described below:

1. Defer the Hawthorns Historic Complex Project until after the Hawthorns Area Plan is adopted and implementation of Area Plan projects is underway - *supported by a majority of the Committee and General Manager.*
2. Defer the Hawthorns Area Plan Project and redeploy staff resources to other priority endeavors – *supported by a minority of the Committee.*

SUMMARY

After numerous months of discussions, site visits, and exploration of various permitting pathways with Town of Portola Valley (Town) elected officials and staff, the 2025 Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee is forwarding two options for how to proceed with the Hawthorns Historic Complex Project. This report provides the background of how the Hawthorns Historic Complex Project emerged and the issues facing its progress, as well as all the work completed by the 2025 Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee and how they arrived at the two options before the Board of Directors.

BACKGROUND

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) has been planning for the future use and management of the Hawthorns Historic Complex (Historic Complex) in the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve since April 2023. The Board of Directors (Board) formed an Ad Hoc Committee in September 2023 (2023 Ad Hoc Committee) to provide guidance on the planning process ([R-23-103](#)). A partnership opportunity arose related to the Lower Barn (Lower Barn Partnership Project) in February 2024, which became the focus of the 2023 Ad Hoc Committee. Over the course of eight meetings, the 2023 Ad Hoc Committee explored the barn's rehabilitation and re-use as programming space that would serve people with disabilities and considered a focused, high-level feasibility study conducted by District staff for the Lower Barn Partnership Project. Preliminary results of this feasibility study were presented to the Board on January 22, 2025 ([R-25-17](#)).

Following the January meeting, staff analyzed in greater detail the Town and Woodside Fire Protection District (WFPD) regulations related to permitted uses, access, and infrastructure. This analysis, consultation with Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) on the compatibility of the proposed uses with the underlying Conservation Easement, and a meeting with Town Staff and a WFPD representative concluded that re-use options are limited for the Lower Barn (or any other structure) because of current zoning regulations that requires a major site improvement that is restricted under the Conservation Easement. This major impediment relates to a Town zoning requirement for vehicular and emergency access off an arterial road (Alpine Road) that necessitates significant upgrades to the internal dirt road extending from Alpine Road to the Historic Complex. Facing these obstacles, the project team presented its findings and potential options to the Board on May 28, 2025 ([R-25-68](#)).

Seeking creative solutions to advance the Lower Barn Partnership Project, at the June 11, 2025 Board Meeting ([R-25-81](#)), the Board formed a new Board Ad Hoc Committee (2025 Ad Hoc Committee) to work directly with Town elected officials, Town staff and WFPD in further exploring options for the Lower Barn Partnership Project and other structures in the Historic Complex. More specifically, the 2025 Ad Hoc Committee's charge was as follows:

- 1) Work directly with the Town and WFPD elected officials and staff to explore creative solutions to re-use the Lower Barn as programming space for adults with disabilities that is consistent with the Conservation Easement held by POST;
- 2) Work directly with the Town and WFPD elected officials and staff to explore the District's options for future use and management for the other structures in the Historic Complex that are consistent with the Conservation Easement; and
- 3) Explore the feasibility of transferring ownership of the Historic Complex to a government or non-profit entity.

The 2025 Ad Hoc Committee has concluded their meetings with District staff and conversations with Town elected officials and staff and is forwarding two options for Board consideration.

DISCUSSION

Since its formation, the 2025 Ad Hoc Committee met four times, and individual committee members engaged with Town staff and elected officials on several occasions. The Committee shared coordination efforts with the Town and the potential project partner and explored permitting options to allow for re-use of the Lower Barn (and other Historic Complex structures). As a backup option, the Committee also gained clarification on the ownership transfer process for the Historic Complex area, in the event there may be interest in transferring this portion of the property to an eligible external party. The Committee concluded that an ownership transfer and/or re-use of the Historic Complex structures face lengthy review and permitting processes that are resource intensive for the District.

Ownership Transfer Process

Committee member coordination with the Town revealed that subdividing the Historic Complex area from the overall Hawthorns property would need to go through a lengthy public process for Town Planning Commission review and approval. If the Town was interested in acquiring this land, the Town Council would also need to follow a public review and approval process, as would the District's Board.

Re-Use Options and Zoning Code Amendment

In earlier conversations, Town and District staff had discussed a Conditional Use Permit as the permitting approach for the proposed use of the Lower Barn as a recreational facility for adults with developmental disabilities. However, more recent discussions with the Town have identified that a Zoning Code amendment would be the Town's preferred approach to revise the Residential Estate (R-E) zoning code ordinance. This would affect not only the Hawthorns property, but *all* R-E zoned properties, which make up the majority of the Town (see Zoning Map in Attachment 2).

A Zoning Code amendment of this magnitude would be substantially lengthy and rely on the willingness and availability of the Town, which continues to experience limited staff time and resources. The effort would also likely generate significant community interest given the Town-wide impact of this Zoning Code amendment, in addition to community concerns of what changes, if any, this type of amendment would have to the rural character of the Town and the scenic Alpine Road corridor.

A Zoning Code amendment at this time would likely delay the Hawthorns Area Plan and its subsequent implementation actions, including actions to introduce public access onto the property. As a reminder, the Hawthorns Area Plan Project is a separate project that will provide overarching guidance on natural and cultural resources, public access, and land management actions for the property, including a high-level use and management overview of the Historic Complex (Attachment 1). Opening the Hawthorns area to public access was identified as a high priority in 2014 as part of the District's Vision Plan process and was included in the voter-approved Measure AA as *Portfolio #6 Windy Hill, Trail Improvements, Preservation, and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership*:

- *Improve trails; complete pond facilities.*
- *Increase multi-use trails; study possible improvements to increase dog use.*
- *Open Hawthorns Area; develop trails connecting to Portola Valley and Palo Alto Trails*
- *Partner to protect, restore and interpret Historic Buildings.*
- *Improve habitat conditions in Los Trancos Creek*
- *Preserve additional scenic open space as available.*

Ad Hoc Committee Conclusions

The 2025 Ad Hoc Committee concluded that the processes for both a Zoning Code amendment and a potential ownership transfer are challenging, time and resource intensive, and continue to restrict the re-use options for the Historic Complex. The length and uncertainty of the Zoning Code amendment process have affected the willingness of the potential partners involved with the Lower Barn Partnership Project, and they have deferred their project and the partnership opportunity with the District at this time.

A majority of the 2025 Ad Hoc Committee concluded that, at present, there is no ability to move forward with the Historic Complex Project without affecting the delivery of the Hawthorns Area Plan Project. A minority felt the complexity of the Historic Complex Project indicates how long and challenging the Hawthorns Area Plan Project could also be and therefore offered an alternative option where the Hawthorns Area Plan Project would be deferred and staff resources redeployed elsewhere. The Ad Hoc Committee is thus forwarding two options for Board consideration:

Option 1: Defer the Hawthorns Historic Complex Project and Continue Pursuing/Focus on the Hawthorns Area Plan – Ad Hoc Committee Majority Support and General Manager Recommendation

Under this option, the Historic Complex Project would be deferred until after the Hawthorns Area Plan is adopted and implementation of Area Plan projects is underway. This option would allow the District to focus on advancing the Area Plan without the delays and challenges described above related to the Historic Complex.

Rationale for Option 1: As described earlier, the Hawthorns Historic Complex Project has encountered continual challenges that are complex and time-intensive to resolve. In addition to needing to comply with the Conservation Easement, resolving challenges related to the site's zoning regulations is a time and staff intensive endeavor that does not align with the Hawthorns Area Plan process and timeline. Uncertainty and high public interest in the Historic Complex adds complexity to the already complicated and lengthy Area Plan Project. Although the Hawthorns Area Plan still requires significant time and effort to complete CEQA review, final Board approval, and obtain permitting clearance from the Town for construction, the District has invested to date five years of work to advance the project. This investment includes over a year of working closely and successfully with the community and public at large through the formation of a Public Access Working Group to arrive at the public access recommendations that are now part of the proposed plan. Moreover, in moving the Hawthorns Area Plan toward implementation, the District will continue making progress in delivering four of the Measure AA priority actions (increase multi-use trails, open Hawthorns area and develop connecting trails, develop interpretative opportunities related to historic resources, and improve habitat conditions on Los Trancos Creek).

Option 2: Defer the Hawthorns Area Plan Project and Redeploy Resources to Other Priorities – Ad Hoc Committee Minority Support

Under this second option, the Hawthorns Area Plan Project would be deferred and staff resources reallocated to other District priorities. If the Board were to select this option, staff would return to the Board with a list of suggested project priorities and tradeoffs for Board consideration, where the Historic Complex Project could be a project priority to discuss.

Rationale for Option 2: The Hawthorns Area Plan Project has been underway for five years and faces ongoing and likely future challenges that will also require time and staff resources to resolve related to completing the CEQA review and obtaining permit approvals through the Town to arrive at construction. Based on District experience, advancing new projects within the Town has been uniquely difficult and time consuming. Some of these challenges are due to the extensive level of resident engagement; code requirements and restrictions; many levels of Town staff, committee, and elected official reviews; and overall limited Town staff capacity. The difficulty, time, and cost needed for the Hawthorns Area Plan Project to advance will likely continue to compete with other Measure AA capital projects that the District needs to accomplish over the next 19 years.

FISCAL IMPACT

The recommended action has no immediate fiscal impact.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- March 23, 2022: Board reviewed and approved the Hawthorns Area vision and goals ([R-22-45](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- September 13, 2023: Board formed an Ad Hoc Committee to explore ideas for the future use and management of the Historic Complex ([R-23-103](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- April 10, 2024: FYI to the Board regarding a partnership opportunity for the Lower Barn ([April 10, 2024](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- July 10, 2024: Board reviewed and commented on the Vision and Goals for the Hawthorns Historic Complex ([R-24-86](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- July 10, 2024: Board reviewed and approved the Interim Stabilization and Debris Removal Plan for the Historic Complex ([R-24-87](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- August 28, 2024: Board approved the Hawthorns Historic Complex Vision and Goals ([R-24-109](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- October 9, 2024: Board received an informational presentation on the Hawthorns Historic Complex Lower Barn Partnership feasibility work ([R-24-122](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- January 22, 2025: Board reviewed the feasibility work conducted to date on the Lower Barn and directed staff to pursue the Lower Barn partnership opportunity ([R-25-17](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- May 28, 2025: Board received an informal presentation on the results of the feasibility study and the limited next step options for the Historic Complex and directed staff to return to the Board with a recommendation to form a new Ad Hoc Committee to work directly with the Town ([R-25-68](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- June 11, 2025: Board formed a new Ad Hoc Committee to work directly with the Town and WFPD elected officials and staff to further explore options for the Lower Barn project and other structures in the Historic Complex ([R-25-81](#), [meeting minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act and to the interested parties list.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act. Future decisions related to the use and management of the Historic Complex may be subject to environmental review; this environmental analysis would be completed prior to Board consideration of a Use and Management Plan amendment and implementation.

NEXT STEPS

The General Manager will implement the option that the Board selects at tonight's meeting.

Attachment

1. Hawthorns Area Planning Projects Map
2. Town Zoning Map

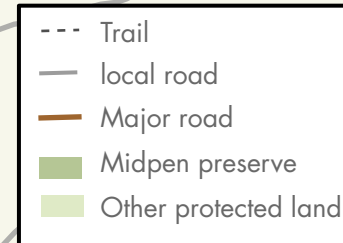
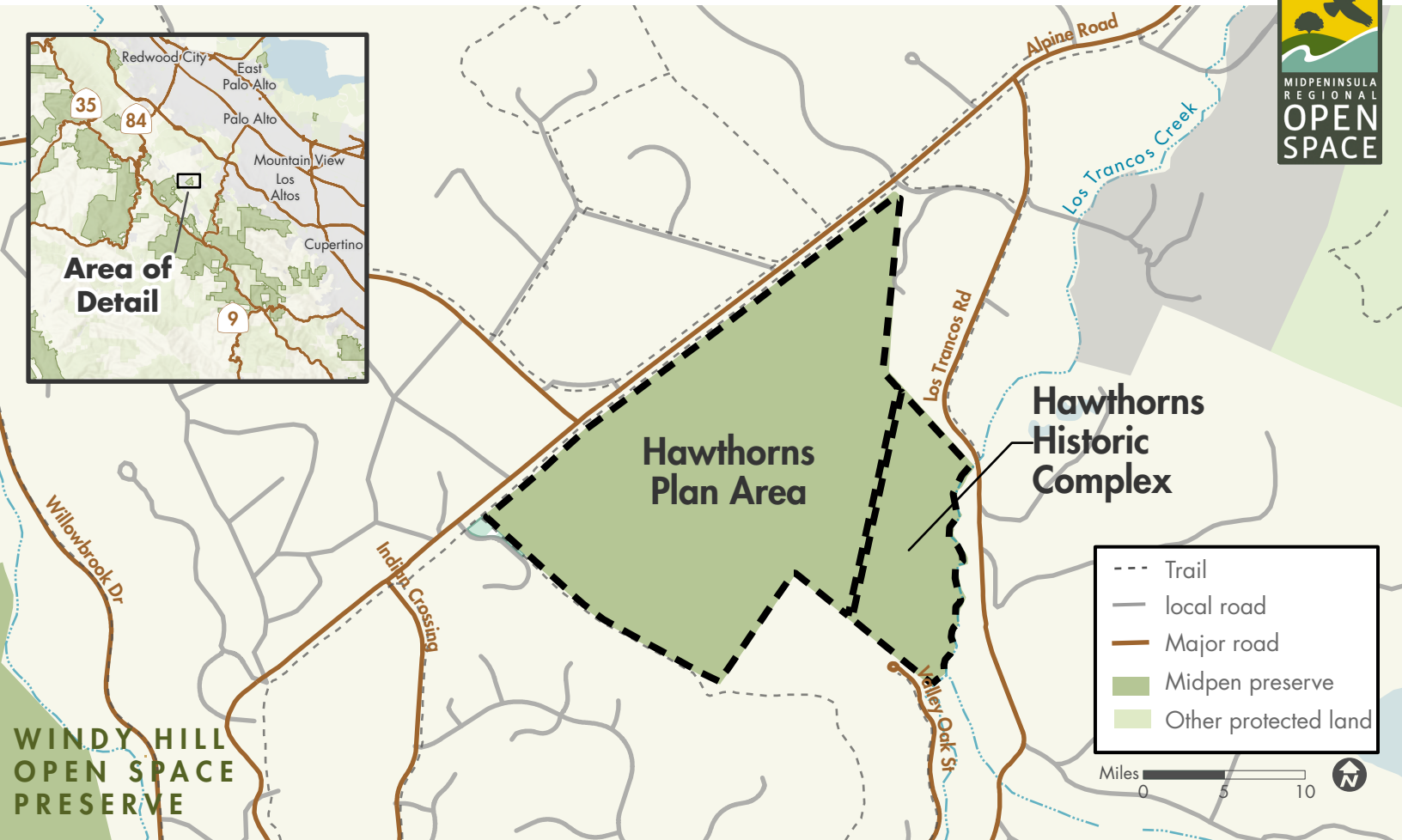
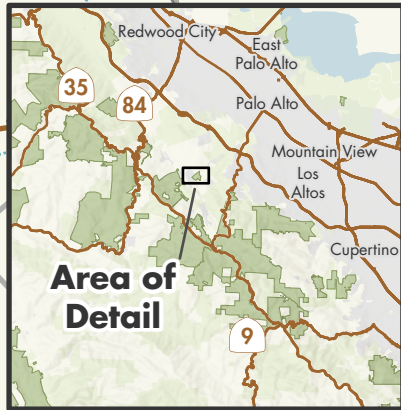
Responsible Department Head:

Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Department

Prepared by/Contact Person:

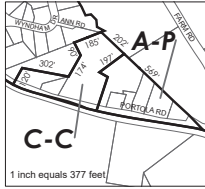
Erica Strohmeier, Planner III, Planning Department

Tina Hugg, Senior Planner, Planning Department



ZONING MAP

FOR THE TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY



INSET A

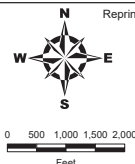


	<u>Ordinance No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Ordinance No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Adopted:	1967-80	7/12/67		
Amended:	1969-97	9/24/69	1989-246	9/22/89
	1973-119	2/14/73	1990-251	4/11/90
	1973-126	1/9/74	1990-253	7/11/90
	1976-147	10/13/76	1995-283	4/21/95
	1979-171	4/11/79	1996-287	4/10/96
	1981-181	3/11/81	1998-305	1/14/98
	1981-182	4/8/81	2003-347	2/26/03
	1983-247	7/20/83		



Legend

- RE/1A Zoning Boundary & Designation
- Special Building Setback Lines - S



Reprinted July 2007

PROJECTION: CALIFORNIA STATE PLANE COORDINATES,
ZONE III, NAD83 DATUM. UNITS IN FEET.
PUBLISHED: OCTOBER, 2004