



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

# Memorandum

DATE: February 4, 2016

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Stephen E. Abbors, General Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "SEA", positioned to the right of the "THROUGH" line.

FROM: Lisa Bankosh, Planner III

SUBJECT: Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan

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This memorandum provides the Board with an update on the current progress and recent developments related to the Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan, including receipt of a letter of interest for reuse of the chapel and 1934 library.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan (Plan) is a Key Project on the Fiscal Year 2015-16 Action Plan and is being completed concurrently with the Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve Plan. The site is listed as a historic resource on the Santa Clara County Heritage Resources Inventory. An Environmental Impact Report is being prepared to address the potential environmental impacts associated with future implementation of the Alma College Plan; this EIR is expected to be released for public review by Summer 2016.

## **DISCUSSION**

In June 2015, the Board approved the outer limits of the potential scope of work for the Alma College Plan as the CEQA project description to begin the environmental review process (see R-15-92). In essence, this scope would allow for small-scale, low intensity uses consistent with the District's Mission and Basic Policy. Phase I of the Plan would include stabilization of the chapel, 1935 library superstructure, and the northern retaining wall, demolition of the large 1950 library and all other buildings, and installation of safety and security improvements. Site interpretation and rehabilitation of landscape elements would occur in Phase II. Finally, the District would potentially seek a long-term lease with a partner organization to fund architectural rehabilitation and reuse of the chapel in Phase III. At the CEQA Scoping meeting in June 2015, the Board removed the alternative to retain and stabilize the 1950 library building, which due to its size may have facilitated uses that support larger and/or higher intensity uses. Therefore, under the Plan, potential reuse scenarios have been developed to provide small scale, low intensity uses that are consistent with District's Mission and Basic Policy.

A market demand study and identification of potential viable partners for the site rehabilitation and/or future operations was performed by Chuck Nozicka, a Tourism and Recreation Planning consultant. Based on the prescribed low-intensity level of use, the market analysis identified the

following potential viable uses: outdoor and science education, historic winery, a heritage site/garden, and outdoor recreation.

The study discovered an overall positive demand and interest in outdoor and science education, although the most immediate demand and interest was for a resident/overnight outdoor science education facility. The study also noted that an existing educational group, the Los Gatos Observational Nursery School (the Mountain School), is interested in a day use facility at Alma College. A formal letter of interest from the Mountain School was recently received and is provided as Attachment 1 (a draft response is also provided as Attachment 2). Winery and heritage site use showed a more modest demand, and although the potential for a long-term lease could entice this type of investment and operating cost, site reuse is more likely to result from a significant philanthropic or fundraising effort. The study concludes that such an effort is typically led by an outside organization or individual who becomes the project *champion*. The Mountain School may be able to fulfill this role with Board approval. Alternatively, should the District choose to conduct a formal process to identify a lessee, the study recommends implementing Phase I (Clean-up and Stabilization) as a first step. This initial step is estimated to cost \$3.5M in 2017 dollars and includes:

- Rodent and bat remediation, stabilization (mothballing) of the 1909 chapel;
- Demolition of dormitory, garage, classroom and 1950 library buildings (some foundations to be retained for interpretive purposes);
- Site safety and security improvements;
- Stabilization of the north retaining wall;
- Tree pruning and removal, weed management.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### Geologic Hazards Study

Due to the close proximity of the San Andreas Fault, any structures that are retained will be subject to seismic safety guidelines. Most notably, the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act, which regulates development on or near active fault traces, prohibits the location of most structures for human occupancy across these traces. A “structure for human occupancy” is defined by the Alquist-Priolo Act as any structure used or intended for supporting or sheltering any use or occupancy that has an occupancy rate of more than 2,000 *person-hours* per year. Alma College is located within the Alquist-Priolo zone. Cities and counties regulate development projects within the zones, which includes withholding permits until geologic investigations demonstrate that the development is not threatened by future surface displacement. Because the chapel and library are located in this zone, a geological investigation is required to determine if a subsidiary trace of the fault is within 50 feet of the structures. If evidence of a subsidiary trace is found, the 2,000 person-hour limit would apply.

Given the potential for use of the chapel to be limited to 2,000 person-hours per year (corresponding to less than ten 8-hour days of use annually for a group of 30 students), **a final geologic investigation is critical to determine the economic feasibility of future uses at the site.** This study is planned for Spring 2016. Sufficient funds for the study are included in the FY2015-16 Budget. A contract amendment to fund the investigation is expected to be brought to the Board for approval in March 2016.

# Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School

Lisa Infante Bankosh  
Open Space Planner III  
Mid-Peninsula Open Space District  
330 Distel Circle  
Los Altos, CA 94022

Dear Lisa,

RE: Alma College Site, Bear Creek Redwood Preserve

Mountain School (LGSONS), as you know, has been connecting children and families to nature for almost 60 years. We have hiked in the Bear Creek Redwood Preserve and appreciate its flora and fauna, ridges and creeks, history and wildlife.

As plans for the future disposition of this beautiful site have evolved, we have been watching with great interest. Our Board and Teachers have visited the old Alma College. We have attended your public meetings and have been following what your consultants are recommending for this site.

We are potentially interested in partnering with Mid-Pen on the rehabilitation and maintenance of the main floor of the Chapel and possibly the Library (1934 building) in exchange for a long-term lease. This, of course, would be after the demolition and clearing of the site and the stabilization of these two buildings.

We understand this is a very large undertaking with an undefined time scale. We wanted to take this opportunity to express our possible interest, and will continue to follow this project as it develops.

Sincerely,



Madhuri Fletcher, PhD  
Chair, Board of LGSONS (Los Gatos Saratoga Observation Nursery School)

cc: Leslie Bergh, Director & Teacher



Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

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Madhuri Fletcher, PhD  
Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School  
P.O. Box 33091  
Los Gatos, CA 95031

January 27, 2016

Dear Madhuri,

The Board of Directors of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is deeply appreciative of the Mountain School's commitment to connecting our community to its natural environment. As you are aware, providing opportunities for ecologically sensitive education is integral to Midpen's mission. With implementation of Measure AA funding, we are poised to expand these opportunities, particularly through partnerships with community organizations such as the Mountain School.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in the potential reuse of the former Alma College site at Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve as an outdoor education venue. This spring, the Chapel and Library area will undergo focused geological testing to determine whether the buildings are safe for future occupancy. This testing is necessary due to the buildings' close proximity to the San Andrea Fault. It is possible that occupancy may be limited by state seismic safety standards.

Following completion of the geologic study and Environmental Impact Report, the Board will consider approval of the Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan. If the plan is approved, Midpen will then initiate a permitting process with Santa Clara County to allow for demolition and clean-up of the historic site. Potential site-reuse scenarios and partnership opportunities will be explored in depth at that time.

Despite these uncertainties, the Board remains committed to developing the Alma College Rehabilitation Plan and opening this fascinating site to the public in the near future. We hope this future includes renovation and re-use of one or more buildings, particularly by an organization such as the Mountain School, whose mission is so closely aligned with our own.

Sincerely,

Yoriko Kishimoto  
Chair, Board of Directors