

**FACT SHEET:  
MADONNA CREEK RANCH STABLES  
PLAN AND LEASE**

**SUMMARY**

The Madonna Creek Ranch Stables are located in unincorporated San Mateo County, approximately 1.7 miles east of Half Moon Bay off San Mateo Road (Highway 92) in the Madonna Creek Ranch Area of the Miramontes Open Space Preserve (Preserve). The stables and agricultural lands (totaling ~ 35 acres) are leased from the District by Johnny and Jennifer Cozzolino under an assigned agricultural lease from Peninsula Open Space Trust when the District purchased the property in 2012 (R-12-10). The lease currently allows the stable to board 12 horses.

Prior to the purchase of the property by the District, the tenant obtained a San Mateo County Confined Animal Permit in 2007, which allows for the boarding/keeping of up to 15 horses. This permit is current through 2019. The tenant has requested to construct 3 additional horse paddocks at the stable and increase the number of allowable horses under their lease from 12 to 15.

To begin the process for the Committee to review the tenant's request to allow for 15 horses and the installation of three additional paddocks, staff and Populous, an equestrian consulting firm, have prepared the proposed Stables Management and Improvements Plan recommendations outlined in this fact sheet. This Plan also serves to satisfy a requirement in the Preliminary Use and Management Plan that was prepared as part of the purchase of the property. If supported by the Committee, a new Stable Lease would also be developed which references the Madonna Creek Ranch Stables Management and Improvements Plan.

The leased agricultural lands, which consist of 24 acres of irrigated and dry farm row crops, are not a subject of this meeting or part of the proposed actions and would remain covered under the current lease until an Agricultural Production Plan and new, separate agricultural lease can be developed (scheduled to be completed in the next two years).

**STABLE MANAGEMENT PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Horse Housing & Fence Structures:**

There are currently 12 single horse paddocks measuring roughly 24 feet x 24 feet. The paddock footing is compacted native ground with some rubber matting for stabilization. The paddocks comply with the San Mateo County Planning & Building Department Revised Letter of Decision dated December 20, 2007, whereby the horse stalls and arena shall remain temporary structures, i.e., at no time shall these structures have any permanent foundations or footings.

The proposed 3 new paddocks are located at the southwest end of the stables (Attachment 1.2). Construction would include similar fencing and shelters as are currently used, which staff has determined to be suitable for this site. Paddock footing and stabilization would be improved to keep bedding inside the shelters dry and reduce the chance of storm runoff. The finished footing level of the paddocks would be raised above the surrounding ground level to ensure positive drainage and safe, dry conditions for the horses. Per the recommendations in the Plan, the timber paddock curb would be constructed and backfilled with compacted limestone screenings or decomposed granite, and perforated mats would be placed over the compacted base and lay level with the top of the timbers. Weep holes drilled horizontally through the sides of the timbers would ensure that the elevated base drain at a rate sufficient to prevent water accumulating within the paddocks. As

existing paddocks are improved or replaced going forward, these design guidelines for paddock footing would be implemented to improve overall drainage at the stable.

**Pasture Management:**

To the west of the stable paddocks are two horse turnout pastures (0.4 to 0.5 acres each). Both pastures are on level ground and easily accessible. Horses are allowed access to these pastures daily for an hour or less for exercise and limited grazing. Both pastures are reliant on winter rains and fog drip for irrigation and pasture recovery. Consequently during the summer months they can suffer from moderate overgrazing. In order to improve pasture conditions and still allow for turnouts, the Plan recommends rotational grazing to improve pasture recovery by enlarging the pasture turnout area. There are two grassland areas west of the pasture that are also fully level and readily accessible and contiguous to the existing pasture area. These two areas encompass an additional 1.4 acres (Attachment 1.1). Generally, the tenant dry farms these fields with hay during the winter months. In April/May of each year, the hay is harvested and the fields mowed. The two proposed additional pastures (0.7 acres each) could be temporarily fenced during the summer and fall months and used in rotation with the current pastures to reduce overall impacts and assist with pasture recovery.

**Manure Management:**

The San Mateo County Confined Animal Ordinance Permit requires that manure be placed in a covered container whereby the manure is separated from the ground (Attachment 1.2). The tenant has complied by installing a dumpster for the disposal of manure but still needs to construct a rigid cover to protect the dumpster during inclement weather and prevent the leaching of contaminated runoff. A new covered structure for the dumpster is proposed as a requirement in the Plan to be installed prior to the installation of the three new proposed paddocks. In general though, the stables are kept in a clean and sanitary manner.

**Water Quality:**

The stable site is setback from Pilarcitos Creek by approximately 100 feet with a rich riparian corridor and filter strip, but given its use as an equestrian operation and proximity to the creek, the stables may at times be contributing to water quality issues. The minimum setback from a riparian corridor as required by the County's Confined Animal Ordinance is 50 feet. Therefore, the 100 foot setback would remain in effect as part of the Plan and new lease.

The main stable area is largely unvegetated with the majority of runoff from the horse stalls channeling down the center of the stables into either a drainage ditch or the horse turnout pasture. In an effort to improve water quality, the installation of vegetated swales to the north of the paddocks and behind the manure management area is recommended (Attachment 1.2). The swales would be a minimum of 6 feet wide with a bottom width of at least 2 feet. If required, check dams would be added along the longitudinal slope to increase temporary water storage and infiltration. These swales would slow down on-site water flow and aid in catching solids, excessive nutrients, and pathogens.

**Drainage:**

The stable site relies on open, earth-formed drainage ditches to control storm runoff generated on-site and on the farm roads, as well as that flowing from the highlands to the creek. Additionally, the main drainage ditch running along the west side of the farm road (along the east edge of the stables) flows into an underground extended culvert approximately 10 inches in diameter with a very modest slope to daylight at the north end of the stable premise. In heavy storm situations, the amount of storm runoff exceeds the capacity of the culvert and spills over into the northern part of the stable area and pastures. Given the impact of the off-site flow on the stable, a hydrology study of the complete watershed impacting the site would be conducted by the Natural Resources Department to properly address drainage and develop a long-term plan for site drainage within the next 2 to 3 years.

**Stable Security**

Currently, no electrical service is provided to the facility.

It is recommended that the District grant the Tenant permission to install electrical service at the facility for the operation of an entrance gate and lighting at the facility office to facilitate tenant caring of the horses in the winter months. Both additions would improve the overall security of the facility.

**Public Access:**

In the current lease, there is a provision to designate an Equestrian Permit Parking area within the Leased Premises. This area would allow for the parking of one vehicle and two horse trailers at any one time. This designation would allow, by permit only, members of the public to trailer their horses to the stable and access the same trails that are open to the tenant and stable boarders (see attached stable map). Currently, this designated parking area is not signed. As part of the proposed Plan, this available public parking would be signed and the area kept clear to allow access when needed. The District would provide the signage, which the tenant would install.

**NEXT STEPS**

**Lease:**

If the proposed Plan is supported by the Committee, staff would finish developing a standardized District Stable Lease for the Madonna Creek Ranch Stables that includes the proposed increase in the number of horse paddocks from 12 to 15, as allowed under the current County permit. The Lease would reference the Madonna Creek Ranch Stables Management and Improvements Plan and require that the Plan be implemented as part of the Lease. The proposed term for the lease would be for 5 years with a 5 year extension with the current tenant, Johnny and Jennifer Cozzolino. Additionally, the Lease would ensure future equestrian public permit access to the Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve.

**Madonna Creek Stables Management and Improvements Plan:**

The Plan would be completed inclusive of any changes made by the Real Property Committee on March 22, 2016 and included in the subsequent Board report.

**Environmental Review:** Environmental review is underway in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

**Board Action:** The District's Board of Directors is expected to consider the Madonna Creek Ranch Stables Lease and Management and Implementation Plan at a public meeting in the spring of 2016. If approved, the District would enter into a lease with Johnny and Jennifer Cozzolino. As part of the implementation of this stable plan, the rigid structure over the manure dumpster will be required to be constructed by the tenant before the three additional paddocks are installed. Additionally, the following requirements would be implemented over a 3 year period:

- Clear debris adjacent to entry gate (Year 1, tenant)
- Identify and sign public equestrian permit trailer parking (Year 1, tenant/District)
- Relocate hay storage adjacent to stable office (Year 1, tenant)
- Implement/temporary fencing of two westerly turn out pastures (Year 2, tenant)
- Construct vegetated drainage swales within equine premise (Year 2, District)
- Construct wash pad and daylight to drainage ditch (Year 2, tenant)
- Implement rotational grazing practices (Year 2, tenant)
- Complete hydrology study of watershed impacting equine premise (Year 3, District)

**Public Participation:** Interested parties are encouraged to contact Lupe Hernandez, Real Property Administrative Assistant, at the District office (650) 691-1200 to request that their names be added to the public notification list for this proposed property purchase.