




Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: October 28, 2020

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager 

FROM: Korrine Skinner, Public Affairs Manager

SUBJECT: Ombudspersons Summary Report for Fiscal Year 2019-20 Activities

SUMMARY

Per the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Ombudsperson Program procedures, this report summarizes ombudsperson contacts received between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 (FY20). The three Board-appointed volunteer ombudspersons were notified of six inquiries received through the ombudsperson website contact form in FY20. Five inquiries were successfully resolved by staff without assistance from an ombudsperson. One inquiry was not resolved at the staff level and was elevated to ombudsperson involvement.

DISCUSSION

The District established a volunteer ombudsperson program to facilitate interactions between citizens and the District as required by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) during the 2004 annexation of coastal San Mateo County. Under the program, the role of the ombudsperson is to listen to resident concerns; open avenues of communication between residents and neighbors and the District; gather information and educate residents on District policies or procedures and their purpose or effect; facilitate conflict resolution; find other resources to meet resident needs, if applicable; and provide a written summary of citizen concerns as requested by the Board of Directors. Members of the public may request contact with an ombudsperson via a form on the District website, after first attempting to resolve their concerns with staff.

On January 11, 2017, the Board expanded the Ombudsperson Program by appointing a pool of three qualified volunteers to serve as ombudspersons: Lisa Zadek of Half Moon Bay, Kristen Yawitz of Belmont, and Bob Rosenberg of San Jose. Per the ombudsperson program procedures, the appointed ombudspersons provide an annual summary of activities, including whether they are willing to continue service. This report summarizes the activities of the appointed ombudspersons for FY20 (Attachment 1), all of whom have indicated a willingness to continue their service in FY21.

For this period, six inquiries were forwarded to the three ombudspersons per District ombudsperson program procedures. None of the six inquiries had first been brought to the attention of staff, so all were referred first to appropriate staff for initial investigation. Five of the inquiries were resolved satisfactorily by staff without the need for further discussion with an ombudsperson. Staff was unable to resolve the remaining inquiry, which was forwarded to ombudsperson Bob Rosenberg for assistance. As previously reported to the Board, Mr. Rosenberg was also unable to help the District resolve the one inquiry.

NEXT STEPS

In following the ombudsperson program procedures, District staff observed opportunities for improvements and efficiencies to the program. Those recommendations will be brought before the Board as part of the Good Neighbor Policy update, the start of which was delayed by COVID-19 response and is now currently on schedule to come before the Legislative, Funding and Public Affairs Committee in May 2021.

Attachment

1. Ombudspersons Report FY20



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: 10/05/2020

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, Acting General Manager

FROM: Bob Rosenberg, Kristen Yawitz and Lisa Zadek, Appointed Ombudspersons

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2019-20 Ombudsperson Annual Report

As appointed ombudspersons for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District), we submit this annual report of program activities for the time period of fiscal year 2020, which runs July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. Over that period, we received six email inquiries: five were resolved through staff dialogue; one was not resolved by staff discussion and warranted ombudsperson assistance. All of the requests were received through the email contact link on the District’s website.

In fielding the inquiries, District staff observed a tendency for constituents to send the same inquiry to staff, board and ombudsperson contacts at the same time. To clarify the ombudsperson process, which begins with a staff attempt to resolve the concern, the website contact page was edited to better explain the process.

Summary of ombudsperson assistance between July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

Name	Concern	Action	Status
Craig Dremann, submitted December 15, 2019	Mr. Dremann would like the District to formally adopt his suggestions for grassland management, including entering into a contract with him to deploy what he describes as proprietary vegetation management techniques on District land.	Staff have offered Mr. Dremann the opportunity to implement a pilot project on District lands, or apply for a research grant, to demonstrate and further study the efficacy of his proposed activities. Mr. Dremann has submitted several similar comments regarding the same issue, and staff and the board have responded to his questions. Ombudsperson Rosenberg asked Mr. Dremann on several times to express what would satisfy him in a thorough and final statement. Unfortunately, Mr. Dremann's repeated submissions consistently contained new and/or different requests.	Unresolved, after ombudsperson assistance. The board was advised of inability to reach a final resolution.

Additional inquiries received that did not require ombudsperson assistance due to resolution by staff:

2. Jerry Molitor submitted a message through the ombudsperson contact form on March 24, 2020 to express concern over crowding at Purisima Creek Open Space Preserve, which led to cars parking in nearby residential areas. Assistant General Manager Brian Malone resolved this concern by reaching out to Mr. Molitor and sharing the District's efforts to work with local partners to mitigate the parking issues and to educate the public about not crowding the preserves and nearby neighborhoods. In addition, with authorization from San Mateo County, the District installed temporary no parking signs while the County Board of Supervisors considers the District's request to designate additional no parking zones permanently.
3. Dave Greenfield submitted a message through the ombudsperson contact form on April 13, 2020. He expressed frustration over the temporary closure of District preserves to bikes, and requested some areas be reopened to cyclists. Assistant General Manager Brian Malone was able to resolve his concern by explaining that we were experiencing a higher than typical number of injuries to bicyclists and that we needed to limit the draw on emergency response resources, which were already overtaxed due to COVID-19. The temporary restrictions were lifted two weeks later in early May.
4. Michael Acosta submitted a message through the ombudsperson contact form on April 17, 2020. He expressed disappointment over the temporary closure of District preserves to bicycles and concern that the measure would be permanent. Assistant General Manager Brian Malone resolved the concern by elaborating on the District's reasoning behind the closure and reassuring Mr. Acosta that the restriction was temporary. As indicated above, the temporary closures were lifted in early May.
5. Adam Sewell submitted a message through the ombudsperson contact form on April 20, 2020. He expressed disappointment over the temporary closure of District preserves to horses, requested equestrians be allowed to ride again and suggested that the temporary closure to bicycles be made permanent. Assistant General Manager Brian Malone resolved his concern by explaining the concern over public safety behind the temporary closure and reiterated our appreciation of equestrian visitors to the preserves. Similar to the temporary bike closures, these equestrian trail closures were lifted in early May.
6. On May 7, 2020, Stephen Brickley submitted messages through the ombudsperson contact form, the board contact form and the general info contact form simultaneously. He requested documentation of a dog attack that occurred at Thornewood Open Space Preserve on April 21, 2020, because he had not yet received the official report from the San Mateo Sheriff's office. Skyline Area Superintendent Chris Barresi sent Mr. Brickley the report and Chief Ranger Matthew Anderson also reached out and confirmed no additional assistance was needed.

Finally, we would like to report to the Board that each of us is willing to serve as volunteer ombudspersons for fiscal year 2020-21.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Rosenberg
Ombudsperson, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Kristen Yawitz
Ombudsperson, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Lisa Zadek
Ombudsperson, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District