



PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-21-156
November 16, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 2

AGENDA ITEM

Hawthorns Area Plan -- Revised Vision and Goals and Draft Working Group Strategy

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

1. Forward the revised Hawthorns Area Plan vision and goals, with any final adjustment by the Committee, to the full Board of Directors for their consideration.
2. Review and comment on the draft Hawthorns Area Plan working group composition and formation strategy.

SUMMARY

The 79-acre Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve (Hawthorns Area) is located southeast of the intersection of Alpine Road and Portola Road in the Town of Portola Valley (Town). This property was gifted to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) in 2011 and is currently closed to the public. In early 2021, staff initiated a multiyear process to develop the [Hawthorns Area Plan](#) that will guide the implementation of ecologically-sensitive public access improvements and future management activities on the property.

Development of the Hawthorns Area Plan will align with the vision and goals approved by the District Board of Directors (Board) to establish an overarching direction for the future use and management of the property. At the August 24, 2021, Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee meeting (R-21-112), PNR members reviewed and commented on the draft vision and goals. Staff then refined the vision and goals in response to PNR and public comments. At this November 16, 2021, PNR meeting, staff will present the revised vision and goals to the PNR for recommendation to the Board.

Staff will also present a draft composition and formation strategy for a potential working group to assist the District with assessing opportunities and constraints for public access improvements at the Hawthorns Area and submitting recommendations for PNR review. If supported by PNR, staff will refine the working group strategy in response to PNR feedback and return with a revised working group strategy in early 2022 for their final review and confirmation prior to forwarding a recommendation to the Board for their consideration.

REVISED VISION AND GOALS

The proposed planning process for the Hawthorns Area Plan begins with the development of vision and goals, which represents the overarching guidance for use and management actions on

the property. Based on PNR and public comments received on August 24, 2021 (please refer to Attachment 1 for details), staff revised the vision and goal statements (provided below) for PNR review and public input. Text additions are provided in underline. Text deletions are provided in ~~strikeout~~.

Revised Vision

Manage natural, scenic, cultural, and open space values at the Hawthorns Area and provide ecologically sensitive public access consistent with the allowable uses outlined in the property's conservation easement. ~~The Hawthorns Area offers picturesque views of rolling oak grasslands and the Santa Cruz Mountains, provides important wildlife refuge, and reflects the region's natural, agricultural, and social history. The District will protect biotic resources and interpret natural and cultural resources on the Hawthorns Area in a manner consistent with the District's mission and the property's conservation easement.~~

Revised Goals

- **Natural Resources:** ~~Protect and restore native habitat~~ Manage for ecological resiliency of aquatic and terrestrial habitat, wildlife corridors connectivity, and other sensitive natural resources.
- **Public Access:** Open the Hawthorns Area to low intensity public access ~~with~~ and provide sufficient parking, multimodal access options, an internal trail system, and strategies that promote multi-modal access to the property ~~low intensity recreational amenities that support ecologically sensitive public enjoyment.~~
- **Regional and Local Connectivity:** Connect to adjacent public trails and explore opportunities ~~for to facilitate new regional~~ to regional open space lands.
- **Natural and Cultural History:** Interpret ~~the rich~~ natural, cultural, and historic features of the Hawthorns Area and pursue partnerships to manage the property's natural and cultural history ~~key features of the Hawthorns Historic District.~~
- **Aesthetics:** Highlight scenic viewpoints and integrate recreational amenities into the visual landscape ~~protect scenic viewsheds.~~
- **Operation and Maintenance:** Manage the property for safe public access in a ~~safe and~~ fiscally sustainable manner ~~that promotes ongoing public support and appreciation with ongoing public engagement and consistent with the District's Good Neighbor Policy.~~

DRAFT WORKING GROUP COMPOSITION AND FORMATION STRATEGY

The District will consider formation of a working group to develop low intensity public access facilities at the Hawthorns Area. Public access elements include internal trail systems, trail connectivity, trailhead locations, parking area locations, and allowable uses. Conceptual development of these features would greatly benefit from engagement with local stakeholders.

The Hawthorns Area Plan will be a comprehensive blueprint for long-term management of the property, and public access is only one component of the Area Plan. The District will internally develop other Area Plan elements and identify land management actions to protect natural resources, steward cultural and historic features, and conduct ongoing site operations and management. While the development of these other elements is not the focus of the working group, these elements may be included in working group discussions to inform, and be informed by, potential public access alternatives. The public will have opportunity to review and comment on these other elements as part of future PNR and Board reviews of the Area Plan.

Purpose of the Working Group

The purpose of the working group would be to establish an interactive forum of local and regional perspectives to collaborate with the District on a plan for introducing public access at the Hawthorns Area in a manner consistent with the Board-adopted vision and goals.

Goals and Outcomes for the Working Group

The working group would evaluate the following public access components:

- Parking area and driveway location(s)
- Trailhead locations and internal trail system
- Trail connections with surrounding Town trails and pathways
- Opportunities for regional trail connections
- Possible trail uses within the Hawthorns Area

Through the working group process, the District would present draft Conceptual Alternatives for the Hawthorns Area Plan to the PNR and Board for review and input. As part of future phases of the planning process, the District would refine the draft Conceptual Alternatives to present a preferred alternative to the PNR and Board, which, if approved by the Board, would serve as the project description for environmental review.

Working Group Formation and Term

The Board would authorize formation of the working group to operate until Board approval of the Conceptual Alternatives. The working group would begin in mid-2022 and be active for approximately 18 months, with the timeline extended if needed. Upon identification of Conceptual Alternatives, the Board would determine whether the working group has fulfilled its charge and, if so deemed, direct the General Manager to dissolve the working group.

Working Group Composition

The working group would consist of nine members, described in **Table 1**. Each member would represent a relevant focus area and reside within the District's jurisdiction. Example focus areas include natural resource protection, trail connectivity, trail groups, interpretation and education, and Town community interests. The District values diversity as a core principle and would apply principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the recruitment of working group members in all focus areas.

Table 1 – Working Group Composition

Focus Area	Role Description	Potential Recruitment Partner
Natural Resource Protection	Advocate for ecological resiliency	Green Foothills
Regional Connectivity	Support regional trail connectivity	City of Palo Alto Community Services Department
Hikers	Represent hiking perspectives	Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
Interpretation	Represent environmental/cultural education and interpretation.	District docents
Equestrian Community	Represent equestrian perspectives	Equestrian Trail Riders Action Committee
Local Schools	Represent Safe Routes to Schools and Alpine Road Trail users	Portola Valley School District

Focus Area	Role Description	Potential Recruitment Partner
Portola Valley Ranch	Represent neighbors adjacent to the Hawthorns Area	Portola Valley Ranch HOA
Town of Portola Valley Community Member	Represent Town community interests	Town of Portola Valley
Town of Portola Valley Community Member	Represent Town community interests	Town of Portola Valley

Working Group Member Recruitment

District staff would identify working group candidates via direct solicitation to the recruitment partners listed in **Table 1**. The District would request candidates that are non-elected members of the community to provide an equitable platform where all working group members have comparable status, voice, and contribution. Staff would meet with each recruitment partner to describe the following:

- Overview of the Hawthorns Area and planning process
- Hawthorns Area vision and goals
- Working group purpose, desired outcomes, duration, and anticipated schedule
- Working group focus area(s) and role(s)
- Expectations regarding participant involvement
- District's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the working group formation, composition, and planning process

The District would request up to three candidates from each recruitment partner to fulfill the assigned roles outlined in **Table 1**. Recruitment partners could recommend candidates from within either their agencies/organizations or external networks.

District staff would contact each candidate to introduce the working group process and request a brief letter of interest and biography. District staff would then host individual interviews to assess candidate qualifications and confirm willingness to join the working group. District staff would interview, rank, and select candidates based on the criteria listed below:

- Demonstrates strong technical expertise or interest relevant to the assigned role
- Enhances the diversity of working group participants based on background or experience
- Communicates clearly and concisely
- Indicates willingness and availability to commit sufficient time to the working group process
- Expresses a positive, open-minded, constructive, and collaborative attitude

If no candidates recommended by a recruitment partner are available to join the working group, District staff would either seek a working group candidate through another recruitment partner, or approach candidates identified from within the District's network.

Top-ranked candidates would be asked to provide a written commitment to participate in the working group process, review materials, complete assignments, attend all meetings, and work collaboratively to achieve success. Staff would then recommend candidates to the Board for consideration and approval prior to initiating the working group process.

If the Board requests different candidate(s), District staff would provide the next candidate(s) on the selection list for consideration. If no candidate names remain on the list, District staff would identify alternative candidates within the District's network.

Liaison and Support Roles

The working group would be supported by the following non-voting roles: one District Board liaison, one Town Planning Commission or Town Council liaison, District staff, and a meeting facilitator.

District Board Liaison

The District's Board President would appoint one Board liaison to represent the District's mission and interests, answer questions about District policy, and function as a conduit between the Board and the working group. To avoid Brown Act conflicts, the appointed Board liaison would not be a current member of the PNR.

The Board liaison would attend all working group meetings and complete homework assignments but would not vote in working group decisions. One Board liaison is the preferred approach to maintain a nimble working group and is commensurate with the small size of the Hawthorns Area.

Town Liaison

The District would work with Town staff to invite one member from the Town Planning Commission or Town Council to join the working group as a liaison. The Town liaison would represent Town interests and answer questions regarding Town policy. The Town liaison would attend all working group meetings and complete homework assignments but would not vote in working group decisions.

District Project Team and External Facilitator

District staff and consultants would assist the working group with meeting logistics, preparation, record-keeping, and facilitation.

Tentative Meeting Format and Timeline

District would host approximately eight working group meetings every eight weeks, all of which would be open to the public and subject to the Brown Act. **Table 2** outlines the tentative working group meeting timeline. The timeline may be modified if the working group finds they need more time to deliberate or discuss a topic, or the PNR requests that the working group address additional revisions before returning to the PNR or Board.

Table 2 – Tentative Working Group Meeting Schedule

#	Objective
1	Establish working group roles, goals, workplan, schedule, and operating procedures
2	Conduct in-person property tour
3	Review existing site conditions
4	Conduct public open house
5	Discuss parking and driveway alternatives
6	Discuss internal connections, trailheads, and regional connectivity opportunities
7	Review draft trail and parking alternatives

#	Objective
8	Confirm revised trail and parking alternatives to forward to the District's PNR and subsequently to Board for consideration

FISCAL IMPACT

Review and comment on the revised vision and goals and draft working group strategy has no direct, immediate fiscal impact. Funding for further planning efforts and related costs this fiscal year are within the approved Fiscal Year 2021-22 (FY22) budget.

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #6 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership allocation, costs-to-date, projected future project expenditures and projected ending balance at the portfolio level.

MAA06 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership Portfolio Allocation:	
Total Portfolio Allocation:	\$12,740,000
Life-to-Date Spent (as of 10/18/2021):	(\$40,951)
Encumbrances:	(\$61,853)
Remaining FY22 Project Budgets:	(\$49,472)
Future MAA06 project costs (projected through FY25):	(\$95,796)
Total Portfolio Expenditures:	(\$248,072)
Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$12,491,928

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #06 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership allocation, costs-to-date, projected life-to-date project expenditures and projected portfolio balance remaining.

MAA06 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership Portfolio Allocation:	
Total Portfolio Allocation:	\$12,740,000
Projected Project Expenditures (life of project):	
MAA06-002 Hawthorns Public Access Site Plan and CEQA	(\$248,072)
Total Portfolio Expenditures:	(\$248,072)
Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$12,491,928

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- May 2021: The PNR Committee received an informational presentation on the proposed planning and public engagement process for the Hawthorns Area and provided input and guidance. ([R-21-65](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- August 2021: The PNR Committee reviewed an informational presentation on the proposed draft vision and goals for the Hawthorns Area and provided input and guidance. ([R-21-112](#), refer to Attachment 1 for draft meeting minutes)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Developing the Hawthorns Area vision and goals and working group strategy is not a project subject to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Environmental review is anticipated to occur in a future fiscal year, pending the Board's selection of a preferred alternative as the CEQA project description.

NEXT STEPS

If supported by the PNR, staff will finalize the vision and goals for recommendation to the Board. Staff will also refine the draft working group strategy based on PNR feedback and return with revisions in early 2022 for PNR to consider a recommendation to forward the materials to the full Board.

Attachments:

1. Draft August 24, 2021, PNR Meeting Minutes
2. Public Feedback Received to Date

Responsible Department Head:

Jane Mark, Planning Department

Prepared by:

Alex Casbara, Planner III, Planning Department

Xucan Zhou, Planner II, Planning Department

Contact person:

Alex Casbara, Planner III, Planning Department



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The Committee conducted this meeting in accordance with California Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-29-20. All Board members and staff participated via teleconference.

Tuesday, August 24, 2021

DRAFT MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Director Kersteen-Tucker called the meeting of the Planning and Natural Resources Committee to order at 2:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members present: Karen Holman, Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, and Yoriko Kishimoto

Members absent: None

Staff present: General Manager Ana Ruiz, General Counsel Hilary Stevenson, Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan, Assistant General Brian Malone, District Clerk/Assistant to the General Manager Jennifer Woodworth, Planning Manager Jane Mark, Planner III Alex Casbara, Planner II Xucan Zhou

District Clerk Jennifer Woodworth announced this meeting is being held in accordance with Governor Newsom's Executive Order allowing Committee members to participate remotely. The District has done its best to conduct a meeting where everyone has an opportunity to listen to the meeting and to provide comment. The public has the opportunity to comment on the agenda, and the opportunity to listen to this meeting through the internet or via telephone. This information can be found on the meeting agenda, which was physically posted at the District's Administrative Office, and on the District website. Ms. Woodworth described the process and protocols for the meeting.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion: Director Kishimoto moved, and Director Holman seconded the motion to adopt the agenda.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 3-0-0

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ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Olivier Yiptong provided comments in support of allowing e-bikes on District trails stating they are safe and speeding is not an issue because the rider can easily control their speed.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

1. Approve the June 15, 2021 Planning and Natural Resources Committee Meeting Minutes.

Motion: Director Kishimoto moved, and Director Holman seconded the motion to approve the June 15, 2021 Planning and Natural Resources Committee amended meeting minutes.

Public comment opened at 2:05 p.m.

Ms. Woodworth reported no public comments had been submitted.

Public comment closed at 2:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 3-0-0

2. Hawthorns Area Draft Vision and Goals (R-21-112)

Senior Planner Meredith Manning introduced the members of the project team and their roles for the project.

Planner II Xucan Zhou described the location of the Hawthorns area in the Windy Hill Open Space Preserve near the Town of Portola Valley and public trails in the area.

Planner III Alex Casbara reviewed the proposed draft vision and goals for the Hawthorns area, which seek to protect and restore natural habitats and resources, provide ecologically sensitive public access, support regional trail connectivity, interpret the natural and cultural history of the area, etc.

Director Kishimoto requested and received additional information regarding the requirements associated with Alpine Road Trail being a designated scenic corridor.

Director Holman inquired how the olive grove would be addressed by the project.

Mr. Casbara stated the proposed goal that focuses on the natural and cultural history addresses the need for landscape management, which includes the olive grove.

Director Holman spoke in favor of protecting the viewshed from development not on District land and protecting wildlife connectivity from barriers created by development.

Natural Resources Manager Kirk Lenington stated the undeveloped nature of the area and lack of barriers allows for free passage of wildlife.

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Planning Manager Jane Mark reported District staff are often notified of and provide comments, in support of the District's mission, on external development projects. Ms. Manning added that District trails are designed and built to maximize a natural viewshed for visitors wherever feasible.

Public comment opened at 2:36 p.m.

Dudley Carlson inquired how the District would control the invasive olive trees, which create a fire risk. Ms. Carlson provided comments regarding Sweet Springs Trail, which is maintained by the Town of Portola Valley and borders the property, stating it is very narrow when hikers encounter equestrians on the trail and also experiences erosion due to cyclists. Ms. Carlson also inquired regarding parking for the area and expressed concerns about spillover parking on nearby roads.

Jeremy Dennis, Town Manager for the Town of Portola Valley, expressed concerns regarding spillover parking onto town roads and negative impact of residents. Mr. Dennis spoke in favor of supporting wildlife connectivity and working with the District on the project in the future.

Ms. Woodworth read the submitted comments into the record.

Karen Vahtra stated wildfire is a key concern for Portola Valley and should be included in the project vision and goals. Ms. Vahtra stated additional maintenance may be needed for wildfire prevention including burning coyote brush and other highly flammable fuels.

Public comment closed at 2:44 p.m.

Director Kishimoto recommended including creek restoration in the natural resources goal.

Ms. Manning suggested modifying the Natural Resources goal to state "Protect and restore native aquatic and terrestrial habitats, ..."

Director Kishimoto suggested adding the word 'Local' to the 'Regional Connectivity goal title, and to expand the goal text to prioritize safety for multimodal users accessing the Hawthorns Area.

Director Holman suggested updating the Public Access goal to read "Open the Hawthorns Area to public access ~~and~~ balancing access with the ability to provide sufficient parking..." Director Holman inquired about the type of assistance and support that could be provided by the Town of Portola Valley to locate potential parking areas nearby.

Mr. Dennis reported he has outreached to neighboring property owners, who expressed concern their parking could be overwhelmed on the weekends. He offered to connect District staff with the property owners to continue conversations.

Director Holman suggested a Portola Valley board or committee, or a community group could potentially assist with interpretive options for the Hawthorns house and site.

Director Holman recommended including language for the District to "pursue partnerships to adaptively reuse, rehabilitate, and manage key features of the Hawthorns Historic District..."

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Ms. Ruiz stated there are various challenges and constraints to finding a partner for the site to rehabilitate the structures. Ms. Ruiz suggested keeping the goal broad at this time until more information is gathered.

Director Holman suggested altering the project vision to state it “reflects the region’s natural, agricultural, architectural, and social history” and suggesting including additional description of the property’s conservation easement.

Ms. Manning suggested the vision statement could reference the conservation goals established in the property’s conservation easement, which states the property will be preserved in perpetuity in a natural and undisturbed state.

Director Kersteen-Tucker stated the operations and management goal could be amended to reference the property should be managed in a manner that “provides opportunities to work as good neighbors with surrounding residents and partners in promoting ongoing public support and appreciation.” Director Kersten-Tucker recommended including a reference to wildfire resiliency in the natural resources goal. Finally, Director Kersteen-Tucker spoke in favor of the current language of the natural and cultural history goal.

Ms. Manning suggested modifying the natural resources goal to read: “protect, restore, and provide resiliency for native...” to address wildfire resiliency.

Mr. Casbara stated the operations and maintenance goal could be modified to emphasize public partnerships and neighbor relationships through an adaptive management process.

Director Kishimoto spoke in favor of prioritizing protection of natural resources over the other aspects of the District’s mission.

Mr. Casbara suggested amending the vision to read “The District will protect biotic resources, provide balanced public access opportunities, and interpret natural and cultural resources...”

Ms. Mark stated due to the property’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, the District will follow the Secretary of Interiors standards and suggested including language regarding this in the Natural and Cultural history goal. The goal could be revised to read: “Pursue partnerships to manage the historic resources on the property to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s standards for historic properties.”

Director Holman commented on the public’s high interest for the natural and cultural history of the site, which includes the historic buildings.

Ms. Mark stated staff will provide a revised draft vision and goals for Committee consideration at the November 16, 2021 Committee meeting, based on the Committee’s feedback.

No Committee action required.

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ADJOURNMENT

Director Kersteen-Tucker adjourned the meeting of the Planning and Natural Resources Committee at 3:42 p.m.

Jennifer Woodworth, MMC
District Clerk

ATTACHMENT 2: PUBLIC FEEDBACK RECEIVED TO DATE

District staff received 54 written public comments regarding the Hawthorns Area between April 2021 and November 2021. This input informed the development of the draft vision and goals by identifying key topics and themes relevant to the Hawthorns Area. The following table summarizes the general categories of public interest, arranged by District staff in a manner that corresponds with the draft goals. Please note that individual comments often address multiple themes, and therefore the total number of comments outlined in the following table exceeds the total number of public comments received. Themes with asterisks (*) received additional comments after the August 24, 2021 PNR meeting.

Theme	Number of Comments
<i>Natural Resources</i>	
Fire Safety*	4
Wildlife Connectivity*	3
Viewsheds*	3
Invasive Vegetation Management*	2
<i>Public Access</i>	
Hiking Uses	2
Bicycle Uses	4
Equestrian Uses*	4
Parking*	9
Allowable Uses*	4
<i>Regional Connectivity</i>	
Alpine Road Trail*	3
Local Trail Connections*	10
Regional Connections*	4
<i>Cultural History</i>	
Historic Complex	6
Tribal Resources	2
<i>Operations and Maintenance</i>	
Traffic	1
Staff Residence	1
<i>Other</i>	
General Inquiry/Updates*	16
Schedule	2
Support*	11
Working Group*	2
Public Involvement*	2