



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

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~~ trail connections 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

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