



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-26-14
Meeting 26-05
February 11, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Annual Ombudsperson Summary Report for Activities from January through December 2025

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

1. Review and accept the annual report from the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Ombudspersons regarding Ombudsperson inquiries received in 2025.
2. Accept the resignation of Ombudsperson Kristen Yawitz.
3. Extend the term of Ombudsperson Lisa Zadek through December 2026.

SUMMARY

Per the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Ombudsperson Program procedures, this annual report summarizes Ombudsperson contacts received between January 1 and December 31, 2025. Zero (0) inquiries were received through the Ombudsperson contact form on openspace.org during this period.

DISCUSSION

The District established a volunteer Ombudsperson Program (Program) to facilitate interactions with citizens as required by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) during the 2004 annexation of coastal San Mateo County. The role and duties of the Ombudsperson were established by the Board of Directors (Board) in 2004 (see [R-04-74](#) and Attachment 1), which include: to listen to resident concerns; open avenues of communication between residents and neighbors with 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. Members of the public may request contact with an Ombudsperson via a form on the District website (www.openspace.org/ombudsperson) after first attempting to resolve their concerns with staff.

When an inquiry is received, the Ombudsperson is notified of the concern by email. Staff then make the first attempt to resolve the concern. If staff are unable to resolve the concern, the Ombudsperson then reaches out to the constituent to assist with the concern.

Summary of 2025 Ombudsperson Program Improvements

In 2025, a review of the Ombudsperson Program policies and processes occurred with the following key areas identified for improvement: public interface, selection and onboarding, transparency for ombudspersons and operational efficiencies. On [February 12, 2025](#), the Board received an overview of the improvements, including administrative procedural changes. The Board adopted amendments to the Ombudsperson Application and the Ombudsperson Program description, and improvements were implemented by spring 2025.

Annual Report for Calendar Year 2025

Per the Ombudsperson Program procedures, the appointed Ombudsperson(s) provides an annual summary of activities. The Annual Report, which is provided as Attachment 1 and prepared by staff with review and confirmation from the Ombudsperson(s), summarizes Ombudsperson activities for January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025. For this period, zero (0) inquiries were received.

Summary of Ombudsperson Activities from 2019-2025

To provide the Board with a longer view of Ombudspersons activities over the last six years, below is a summary of the inquiries received, and other Ombudsperson engagement work completed during this period.

Summary of Public Inquiries

From 2019 through 2025, the District received 15 Ombudsperson contact form submissions (inquiries). Of the inquiries:

- 12 were successfully resolved at the staff level without Ombudsperson involvement
- Two (2) were determined to be inquiries outside the purview of the Ombudsperson Program; (one regarding termination of a Boarder Agreement with a third-party concessionaire; and one regarding a legal property issue); and
- One (1) required Ombudsperson engagement (related to the District's vegetation management practices).

Summary of District-Requested Ombudsperson Engagement

For the six-year period 2019-2025, the District requested Ombudsperson engagement in one matter related to Bear Creek Stables to assist with communications and responsiveness between the boarders and former operator, particular in regards to boarding operations and horse care. The Ombudsperson was very helpful in relaying questions and concerns between the two parties and providing a channel for clear communications and status updates. In addition, the Ombudsperson was helpful in relaying questions and concerns to the District for items that pertained to District activities. The need for this role substantially diminished as the Board awaited the results of the Bear Creek Stables Ad Hoc Committee work and with the subsequent change in operator, and therefore is no longer active

One Ombudsperson Reappointment and One Resignation

Per the Ombudsperson Program procedures, the appointed Ombudsperson(s) provide a statement of whether they are willing to continue their service to be considered for reappointment.

At the January 11, 2017 Board meeting, the Board appointed Lisa Zadek and Kristen Yawitz as Ombudspersons (see [Report R-17-05](#)).

Ombudsperson Lisa Zadek has indicated her willingness to continue in her role, which she has served successfully since 2017, and reappointment is recommended. The reappointment would cover a one-year term.

On December 18, 2025, Ombudsperson Kristen Yawitz requested to step down from her role as she will be out of the country for the majority of 2026. Ms. Yawitz fulfilled her annual Ombudsperson responsibilities responsively since 2017. Ms. Yawitz's contributions are greatly appreciated, and the District thanks her for her years of service as an Ombudsperson.

Given the number of public inquiries received annually, maintaining one Ombudsperson in the Program is expected to be sufficient to provide effective and timely responses for the public.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action(s).

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Notices were also issued to each Ombudsperson.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will return in early 2027 with the Annual Ombudsperson Summary Report summarizing the annual activities. In addition, the Ombudsperson Program will be reviewed every five years (in 2029) to evaluate for possible program improvements and adapt to evolving needs.

Attachment

1. Ombudsperson Role and Duties
2. 2025 Ombudsperson Summary Report

Responsible Department Head:
Ana Maria Ruiz, General Manager

Prepared by and contact person:
Lori Low, Public Affairs Manager, Public Affairs Department



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

OMBUDSPERSON PROGRAM

Role of Ombudsperson

The Ombudsperson is an appointee of the Board of Directors who follows up on resident or neighbor inquiries or complaints for the purpose of attempting to resolve misunderstandings or conflicts that have not been resolved satisfactorily by District staff. The Ombudsperson works independently and objectively to assist in maintaining positive relations with District residents and neighbors.

Duties of Ombudsperson

- ❖ Listens to resident concerns
- ❖ Opens avenues of communication between residents and neighbors and the District
- ❖ Gathers information and educates residents on District policies or procedures and their purpose or effect
- ❖ Facilitates conflict resolution
- ❖ Finds other resources to meet resident needs, if applicable
- ❖ Provides a written summary of citizen concerns as requested by the Board of Directors

Scope of Duties

The Ombudsperson would assist residents in their interactions with the District and facilitate conflict resolution when needed. The Ombudsperson would not handle issues that are privileged or confidential, or which involve personnel, labor relations, legal matters, or Board decisions. The Ombudsperson would present facts that may lead the Board or staff to improve operations or better address citizen needs, as opposed to advocating either for or against a resident, staff or Board policy. The Ombudsperson would not establish or recommend District policy, or affect or make fiscal or budgetary decisions.

Assignment and Reporting Responsibilities

If the initial contact from a citizen is the Ombudsperson, the Ombudsperson will contact the General Manager before taking further action. If the General Manager is not able to resolve the concern/complaint to the citizen's satisfaction, the Ombudsperson will follow up with the citizen for further resolution efforts. If the initial contact from a citizen were a Board Member, the Board Member would immediately contact the General Manager. If the General Manager is not able to resolve the concern/complaint to the citizen's satisfaction, the General Manager shall inform the citizen of the District's Ombudsperson process and shall request the Ombudsperson contact the complainant to offer further assistance. The ombudsperson should recuse themselves from any matter where a personal or financial interest could reasonably be perceived as influencing their judgment, creating a conflict of interest. Staff will then assign the issue to a different ombudsperson.

After completing inquiry and resolution efforts the Ombudsperson would then report back to the General Manager and provide a written summary report for the Board at least quarterly.

Ombudsperson Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

To be effective in this role, the Ombudsperson should demonstrate the following knowledge/skills/abilities:

- Facilitation and conflict resolution skills
- Ability to listen, understand and validate others' points of view
- Familiarity with the District's mission and purpose and how the District programs fit into the greater region
- Knowledge of local government functions and operations and land and property use issues
- Interviewing skills
- Customer service skills
- Public speaking skills
- Analytic and evaluative skills
- Writing skills- the ability to express clearly and concisely complex issues and positions in writing
- Objectivity and good judgment
- Create credibility as an independent evaluator capable of independent conclusions
- Sense of humor
- Professional demeanor and appearance

Training, education and/or experience in public administration, management, psychology, public relations, customer relations, investigations, counseling, consulting, teaching, human resources, risk management, related field or as an elected official would likely provide the required knowledge, skills and abilities.

Compensation and Terms of Appointment

Volunteer status (unpaid), with full reimbursement for Board authorized expenses incurred (per contract). One-year term with the possibility of reappointment annually.




Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: February 11, 2026

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager 

FROM: Lisa Zadek and Kristen Yawitz, Appointed Ombudsperson

SUBJECT: Ombudsperson Report for the Time Period of January through December 2025

As appointed Ombudspersons for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District), we submit this report of program activities for the time period of January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

Inquiries

Over that period, zero inquiries were received through the Ombudsperson contact form on *openspace.org*.

In addition to the report:

- Lisa Zadek confirms she is willing to continue services as a volunteer Ombudsperson.
- Kristen Yawitz respectfully resigns from her role as Ombudsperson as she will be out of the country for most of 2026

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Yawitz
Ombudsperson, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Lisa Zadek
Ombudsperson, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District