



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-26-58
April 27, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Design Alternatives for the Kennedy Trailhead Parking Area Improvement Project in Sierra Azul Older Open Space Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Receive a presentation and provide feedback on design alternatives for the Kennedy Trailhead Parking Area Improvement Project.
2. Forward one or both design alternatives to the full Board of Directors for review and approval.

SUMMARY

The Kennedy Trailhead Parking Area Improvement Project (Project) intends to enhance Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility and increase parking capacity in the Kennedy-Limekiln area of the Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve (Preserve). Currently, the Kennedy Trailhead has two unmarked standard parking spaces, and one ADA parking space. The trailhead also has a portable restroom and trailhead signboards. The 40-Year Vision Plan for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District), as approved by the Board of Directors (Board) in 2014, includes Priority #53: *Expand access in the Kennedy-Limekiln Area of Sierra Azul*, with the specific goals to “expand parking at Kennedy Road trailhead” and “address neighborhood parking concerns”. In 2019, the Board adopted the ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan (ADA Transition Plan), which identified barriers for removal in the existing parking, path of travel, and restroom at the Kennedy Trailhead.

District staff completed robust public outreach and preliminary technical studies to prepare two parking design alternatives for consideration to enhance access in the Kennedy-Limekiln Area of Sierra Azul by increasing parking capacity and address the ADA barriers identified in the ADA Transition Plan. Both options consider site amenities such as trailhead seating, improved signage, new restroom facilities, and bike racks.

The purpose of this meeting is for the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) to review and provide feedback on the design options and consider forwarding one or both alternatives to the full Board for approval.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project site is the existing Kennedy Trailhead located adjacent to Kennedy Road in Los Gatos, CA (Attachment 1). The trailhead has three unimproved parking spaces, one of which is marked for ADA use. There is a small, relatively flat area with a small remnant orchard next to the trailhead. The project site is naturally screened from Kennedy Road with a row of mature oak trees. Because there are limited access points into the Preserve, the Kennedy Trailhead is very popular (Attachment 2). According to trail counter data collected in 2023 from February to December, the Kennedy Trailhead welcomes an average of 68+ visitors per day during the week and an average of 140+ visitors per day on weekends. However, there have been as many as 330+ visitors documented on weekends and 200+ visitors on weekdays. Due to the limited amount of existing parking, most visitors park along Top of the Hill Road or park in unauthorized locations on Kennedy Road (Attachment 3).

In 2021, the project was added to the Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP) as an ADA barrier removal project and did not include an expansion to parking. At that time, staff completed initial technical studies, including a traffic report, geotechnical investigation, cultural resource evaluation, and botanical surveys. Staff also engaged with the public at an Open House to discuss improvements at the Kennedy Trailhead, presenting the project scope and the intention to remove two parking spaces in order to establish one (1) standard ADA van-accessible parking stall and a path of travel to the restroom and trailhead sign boards that meet ADA and California Building Code (CBC) requirements.

Upon being presented this information, the public expressed strong concerns about how removing parking to accommodate ADA facilities would exacerbate the limited parking and contribute to more congestion on the adjacent streets. After receiving public feedback, the project was deferred until it could be adequately resourced for an increased scope of work that could address the broader parking capacity issue.

DISCUSSION

Staff re-initiated the project in 2026 by evaluating the opportunities and constraints of expanding parking at the site. The site opportunities include:

- Adequate line of sight distances at the existing driveway.
- Sufficient flat area for a small expansion of parking; and
- Mature vegetation to partially screen the improvements from view.

Site constraints include:

- Numerous adjacent private properties.
- Jurisdictional drainages that require a setback; and
- Existing trees within the expansion area.

Public Engagement

Open House

On Saturday, March 21, 2026, the District held an Open House and Intercept Survey at the Kennedy Trailhead. The event was staffed by members of the Engineering & Construction, Planning, Public Affairs, and Visitor Services Departments. A Town of Los Gatos Peace Officer was present to provide support. The event was attended by approximately 25 visitors, including many neighbors living within walking distance of the trailhead. Staff provided a brief overview of the project program and the existing conditions. Most of the event was reserved for attendees to share their opinions and ask questions. Several themes were discussed:

- Attendees voiced a desire to minimize the project's visual impact on the surrounding neighborhood. Attendees emphasized the importance of vegetative screening between the site and Top of the Hill Road and requested that restroom facilities not be visible from neighboring properties.
- Questions were raised about which trees would need to be removed, with the desire for any required removals be limited to non-native species where feasible.
- Some attendees questioned whether a two-stall restroom was necessary. Staff clarified that the District's standard practice is to install a single, two-stall vault toilet, as the most economical solution to meet current and future visitation needs.
- Attendees expressed a preference for a gravel lot over a paved surface, favoring a rustic aesthetic for the site.
- Attendees requested clear signage to ensure visitors are aware of trail conditions and difficulty levels before entering the Preserve.
- Attendees also stated that peak usage on Top of the Hill Road can reach upwards of 70 parked cars and expressed interest in coordinating with the Town of Los Gatos on restricting on-street parking.
- Attendees expressed concerns that the improvements could bring unwanted after-hours activities to the trailhead, and asked if there would be sufficient surveillance and enforcement of District ordinances.

Overall, the project was met with support from both neighbors and preserve visitors. Many members of the public cited parking congestion as a recurring problem and expressed support for the proposed improvements. Attendees generally recognized the benefit of providing increased parking capacity and saw the project as a positive step forward.

Online Survey

An online survey was also released on March 17, 2026, and will close on April 27, 2026. The following data was gathered from March 17, 2026, to April 6, 2026. Information received after April 6 will be provided to the PNR at the committee meeting. The survey received over 100 responses from a broad range of trail users, 75% of whom do not live within walking distance of the trailhead.

- The vast majority of respondents do not live within walking distance. 75% said No, 21% said Yes, and 4% noted nuanced situations (e.g., biking distance, or walkable but unsafe due to lack of sidewalks).
- Visits are spread across a range of frequencies, with infrequent-to-moderate use being most common. 33% visit once every few months, 22% multiple times per month, 20% once a week, 8% rarely, 8% once a year, and 4% daily.

- Respondents reached the trailhead roughly equally by car and bike. 39% drive alone, 34% bike, 16% carpool, and 8% walk.
- Visit frequency varied from daily users to occasional visitors.
- Approximately 36% of respondents reported experiencing issues at the trailhead, with insufficient parking cited as the primary concern — several noted that overflow onto Top of the Hill Road creates difficult conditions for both drivers and cyclists.
- When asked about desired amenities, increased parking capacity and formal restroom facilities were the most selected improvements, often chosen together. Among all respondents: 58% supported increased parking capacity and 55% supported new restrooms

General feedback was broadly supportive of the project, with many respondents welcoming upgrades comparable to those at other District trailheads such as Mount Umunhum. A minority opposed expanded parking, citing concerns about increased traffic on Kennedy Road and potential overcrowding of the trail. Beyond the core project scope, a notable number of respondents advocated for purpose-built mountain bike trails, and several raised design preferences for a low-impact, rustic aesthetic with vegetative screening and security measures such as after-hours gating to ensure the parking area cannot be entered once the preserve closes.

Design Alternatives

Following the opportunities and constraints evaluation and the public engagement work, staff developed two conceptual designs to achieve the goals described in the ADA Transition Plan and Vision Plan. Both options expand parking, address ADA barriers, and can accommodate trailhead amenities, including vault restroom, signboards, seating, and interpretive elements. The main differences are the quantity of parking spaces, type of vehicular circulation in each option, approximate footprint, and the amount of tree removal required. Portions of both options will require Town of Los Gatos approval for the proposed improvements in the Kennedy Road right-of-way. Below is a complete description of each option followed by a narrative and visual (moon chart) comparison.

OPTION 1 (Attachment 4) – Total Project Cost Estimate: \$1,400,000

- 18 parking spaces, including one (1) van accessible ADA space
- Approximate improvement footprint: 8,530 SF
- Approximately 4 trees proposed for removal
- Utilizes two-way circulation

OPTION 2 (Attachment 5) – Total Project Cost Estimate: \$1,500,000

- 13 parking spaces, including one (1) van accessible ADA space
- Loop drive aisle (no turnaround required)
- Approximate improvement footprint: 8,900 SF
- Approximately 9 trees proposed for removal
- Utilizes one-way circulation

Option 1 offers a more cost-effective design while maximizing parking capacity with 18 spaces. It also has a smaller environmental impact, requiring the removal of only four trees and a slightly smaller improvement footprint. However, these advantages come with usability drawbacks: the

two-way circulation and need for a vehicle turnaround space is less intuitive and may create inefficiencies for visitors, especially during peak use.

Option 2 prioritizes user experience and traffic flow. The one-way loop circulation eliminates the need for turning around, making it more intuitive for visitors. This design is generally easier to navigate and may reduce congestion. The tradeoffs include a slightly higher cost, fewer parking spaces (13 total), and a greater environmental impact due to the removal of nine trees and a larger project footprint.

Option	Fulfills 2012 Vision Plan Goals	Fulfills ADA Transition Plan Goals	Ease of Circulation	Parking Availability	Cost Effectiveness	*Natural Resource Protection
Option 1 (18 Parking Spaces)						
Option 2 (13 Parking Spaces)						

*Natural Resource Protection refers to the comparative level of existing tree retention/removal and grading footprint

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with the recommendation. PNR provides feedback and is considering forwarding one or both design alternatives to the full Board. The Kennedy Trailhead Parking Area Improvement project was previously under Project 35006 but is now changing to Vision Plan Portfolio 53 (VP53-003), which will be reflected in the upcoming quarterly adjustment. Funding for design development and environmental review will be recommended as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

As shown in the table below, the high-end construction estimate for Option 2 fits within current projections.

VP53-003 Kennedy Trailhead Parking Area Improvement	Prior Year Actuals	FY26 Amended	FY27 Projected	FY28 Projected	Estimated Future Years	TOTAL
District Funded (Fund 40):	\$23,856	\$45,000*	\$290,000	\$155,000	\$2,960,500	\$3,474,356
Total Budget:	\$23,856	\$45,000	\$290,000	\$155,000	\$2,960,500	\$3,474,356
Spent-to-Date (as of 04/06/26):	(\$23,856)	(\$6,845)				(\$30,700)
Encumbrances:		(\$4,655)				(\$4,655)
Estimated Construction Costs:					(\$1,500,000)	(\$1,500,000)
Budget Remaining (Proposed):	\$0	\$33,500	\$290,000	\$155,000	\$1,460,500	\$1,939,000

**Includes upcoming quarterly adjustments and most current future projections which will be included in the upcoming FY27 budget and action plan*

This recommended action is not funded by Measure AA.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. In addition, Sierra Azul interested parties and neighboring private properties adjacent to the trailhead were notified of the public meeting.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Formulation of design alternatives will not result in any physical change to the environment. Additionally, it is exempt from environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262, Feasibility and Planning Studies. PNR's recommendation for full Board consideration of design alternatives will not result in any physical facilities or improvements to be constructed at the time of the recommendation. CEQA review will be performed after Board approval of the project description, and subsequent completion of design development and related technical studies for any site improvements.

NEXT STEPS

The General Manager will forward PNR's recommendation(s) to the full Board for consideration in Summer 2026. If the recommended conceptual design plan is approved, staff will proceed with the technical studies for the project, which will then inform the design development and environmental review process.

The table below provides a tentative project schedule and key milestones for the project:

Milestones	Tentative Schedule
Board Review of Conceptual Design	Q4 FY26
Technical Studies, Design Development, Initiate Environmental Review	FY27
Complete Environmental Review, Final Design, Permitting	FY28
Construction	FY29

Attachment(s)

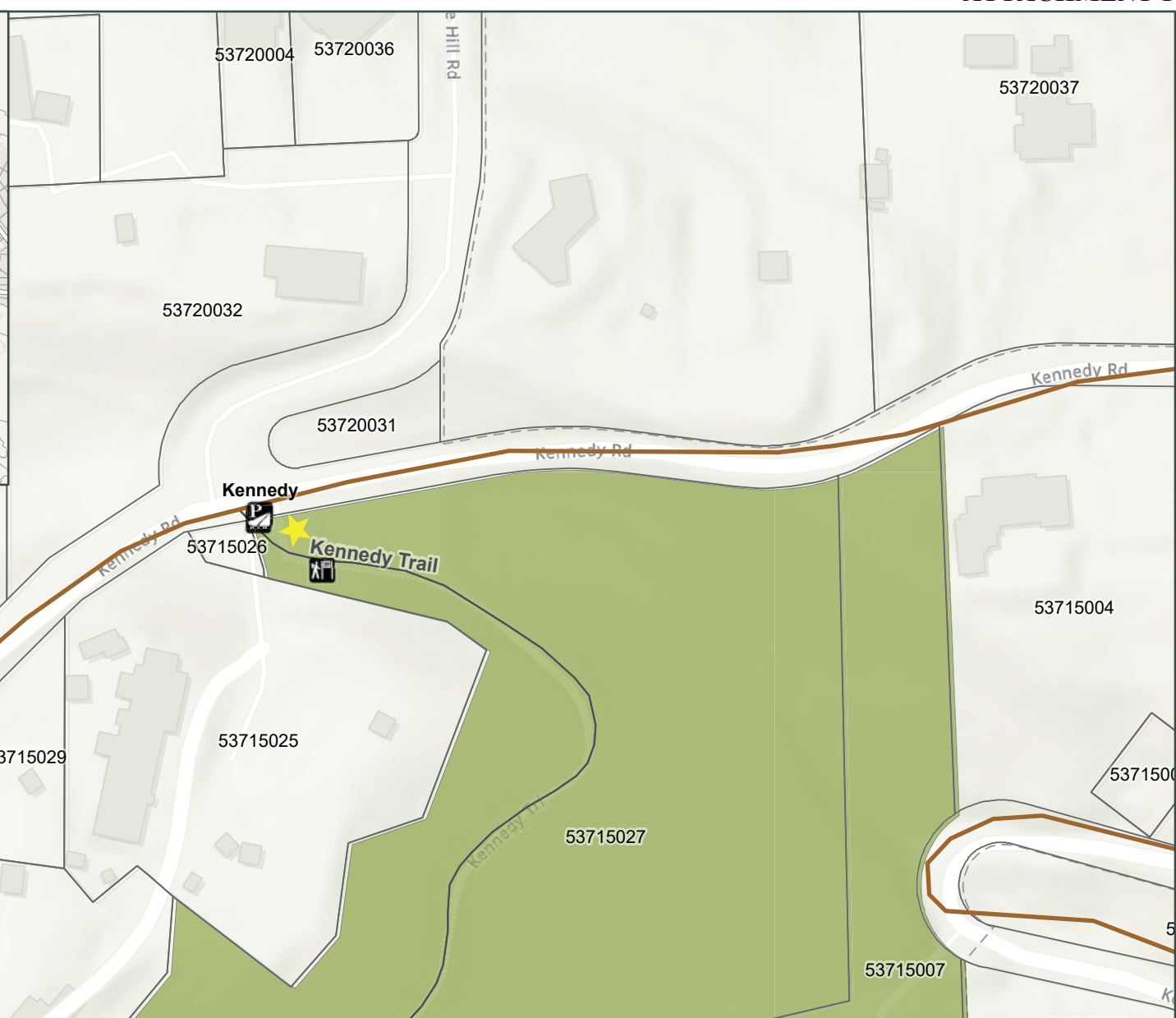
1. Kennedy Parking Area Site Map
2. Sierra Azul OSP Existing Trailheads
3. Existing Adjacent Parking Conditions
4. Conceptual Plan Option 1
5. Conceptual Plan Option 2

Responsible Manager:

Scott Reeves, Engineering & Construction Department Manager

Prepared by / Contact Person:

Ayden Sabharwal, Capital Project Manager I, Engineering & Construction



Kennedy Trailhead

Parking Location



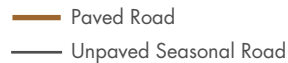
Restroom



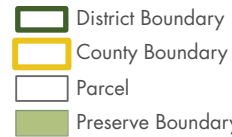
Sign Board



Trail



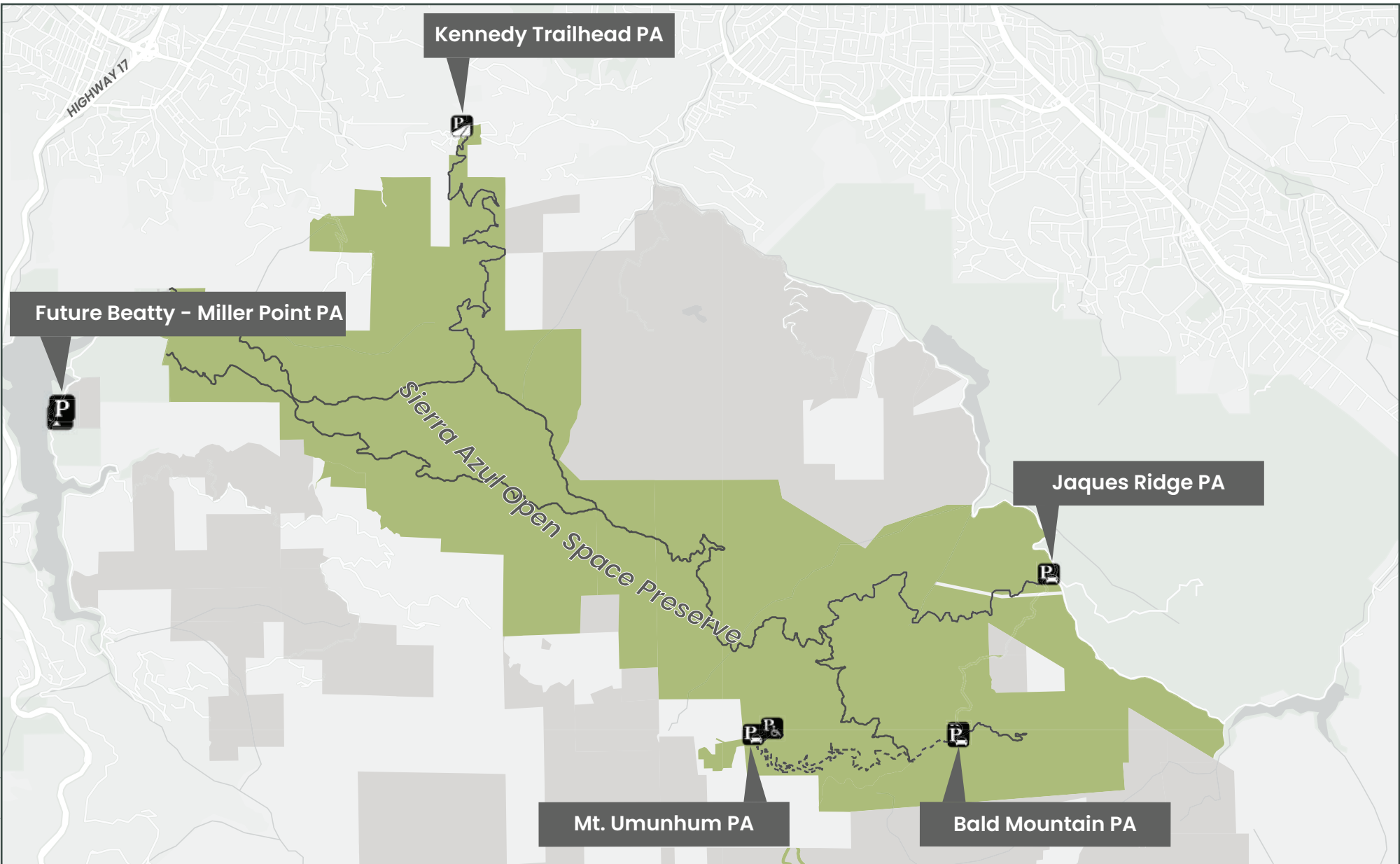
District Boundary



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
4/7/2026



Data Source(s): Sources: Esri, Vantor, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatasystem, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community. Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, PACO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community



Sierra Azul OSP Access Points

Parking Location

- Lot
- Roadside
- Accessible



- Trail**
- Unpaved Seasonal Road
- Trail

Preserve Access (PA)

- Open
- Closed

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
4/22/2026



Data Source(s): Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

1 Vehicles Parked on Top of the Hill Road



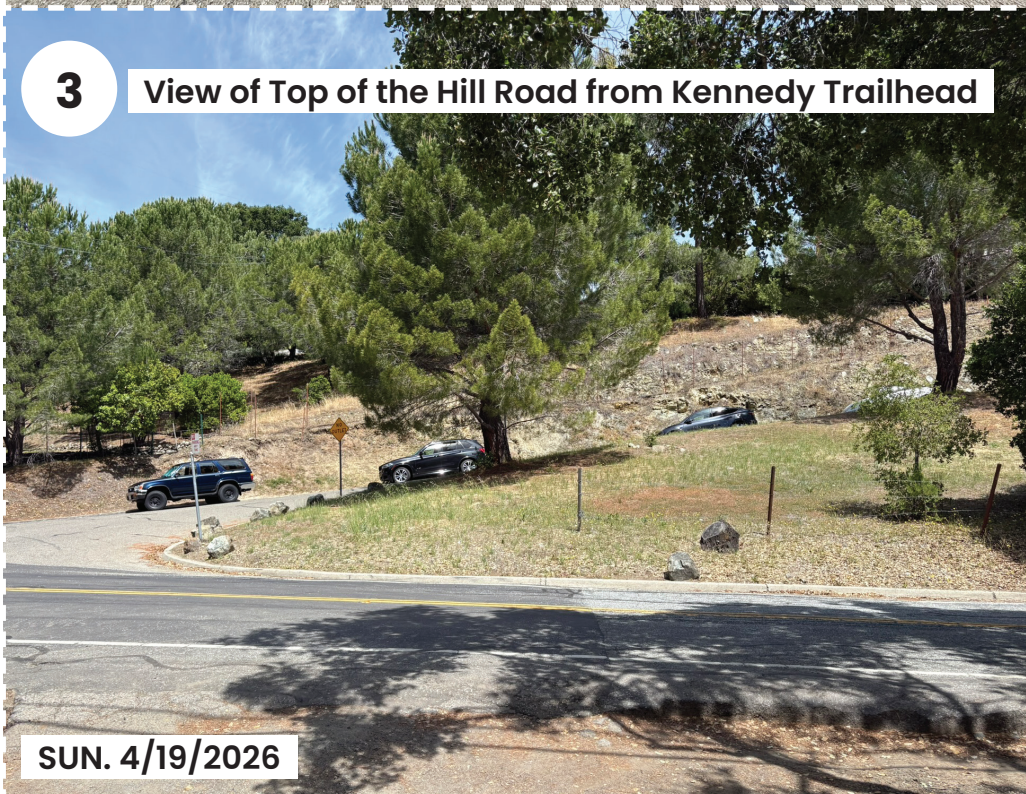
Sun. 4/19/2026

2 Vehicles Parked Along Kennedy Road



Sun. 4/19/2026

3 View of Top of the Hill Road from Kennedy Trailhead

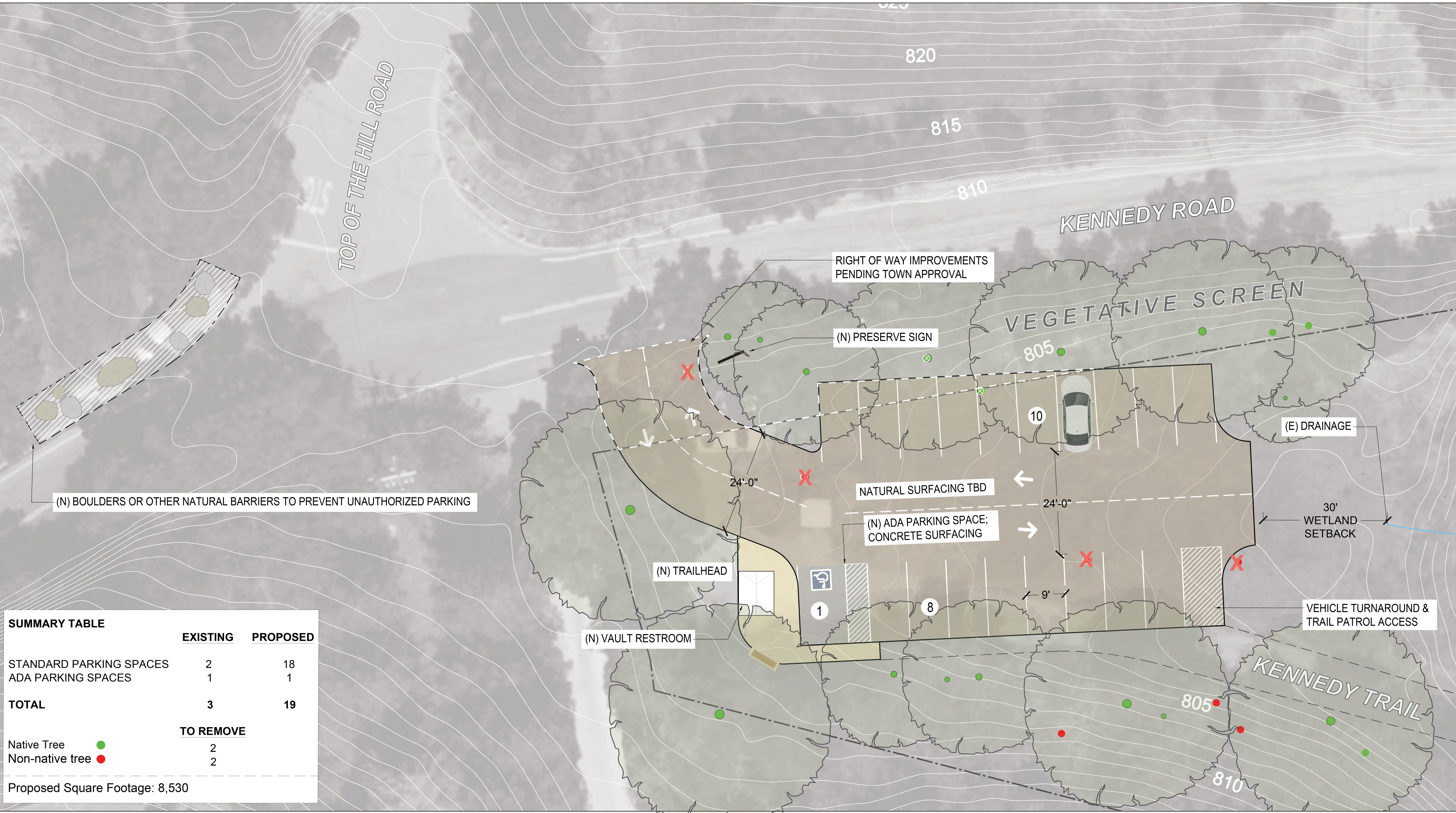


SUN. 4/19/2026

4 Vehicles Parked on Top of the Hill Road



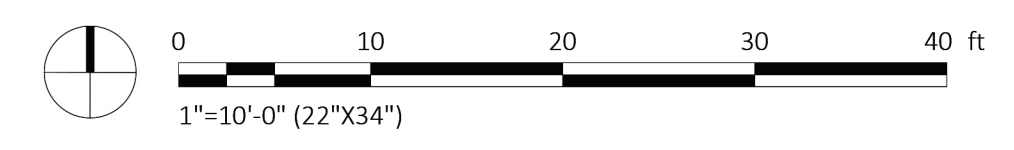
Fri. 7/1/2025



SUMMARY TABLE

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
STANDARD PARKING SPACES	2	18
ADA PARKING SPACES	1	1
TOTAL	3	19
	TO REMOVE	
Native Tree ●	2	
Non-native tree ●	2	

Proposed Square Footage: 8,530





(N) BOULDERS OR OTHER NATURAL BARRIERS TO PREVENT UNAUTHORIZED PARKING

RIGHT OF WAY IMPROVEMENTS
PENDING TOWN APPROVAL

(N) PRESERVE SIGN

NATURAL SURFACING TBD

VEGETATIVE SCREEN

(E) DRAINAGE

30'
WETLAND
SETBACK

7

1

(N) VAULT RESTROOM

(N) TRAILHEAD AND TRAILHEAD AMENITIES

KENNEDY TRAIL

SUMMARY TABLE		
	EXISTING	PROPOSED
STANDARD PARKING SPACES	2	13
ADA PARKING SPACES	1	1
TOTAL	3	14
TO REMOVE		
Native Tree	6	
Non-native tree	3	
Proposed Square Footage: 8,900		

