



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-26-12
Meeting 26-03
January 28, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 7

AGENDA ITEM

Community Partnership Highlight: Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Receive an informational presentation on the partnership with Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. No Board action required.

SUMMARY

Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Vista Center) is a longstanding nonprofit serving more than 3,700 clients annually through programs that support individuals experiencing vision loss. Since 2024, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) has partnered with Vista Center to provide accessible guided outings on District preserves. Vista Center has also collaborated with staff on educational programming and ADA related projects, including reviewing easy access trails. Public Affairs renewed the partnership for 2026 to support four new accessible community outings to advance the Board of Director's (Board) strategic goal of increasing equitable access to open space.

DISCUSSION

Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Vista Center) empowers youth and adults who are blind or visually impaired to live full, independent lives through evaluation, counseling, education and training. Founded in 1936 as the Palo Alto Society for the Blind, the organization evolved from a residential home to a regional leader in vision rehabilitation, becoming the Peninsula Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in 1970 and adopting its current name in 2005. Over the past two decades, Vista Center has expanded its reach through mergers in Santa Cruz and San Jose, increasing Vista Center's capacity to serve thousands of clients through geographically distributed programs, classes, and itinerant services.

Today, Vista Center supports more than 3,700 clients annually through over 50 programs delivered in homes, community settings, and office branches, providing more than 40,000 hours of services each year. Their whole-person approach centers on two core dimensions of vision rehabilitation: independent living skills, which help clients relearn essential daily tasks for safety and autonomy, and life enrichment services, which foster joy, connection and community through activities such as adaptive gardening, yoga, peer support groups and creative workshops.

Through partnerships with local organizations, Vista Center also facilitates accessible nature walks and educational workshops that expand access to outdoor experiences for individuals with visual impairments. Prior to partnering formally with the District, Vista Center had already been

hosting occasional walks on District preserves. The formal partnership has helped deepen participants' understanding of the District's mission to preserve, protect and restore open space lands, while providing more structured, interpretive and multisensory experiences.

The partnership with Vista Center directly supports the District's strategic goal of expanding opportunities for all individuals to connect with public open spaces. Over the past two years, Public Affairs has collaborated closely with Vista Center to provide accessible guided outings on District preserves for people who are blind or visually impaired.

In 2024, Vista Center partnered with the District to offer a pilot outing to Deer Hollow Farm at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve as part of the Partnership Program. Eight participants engaged with tactile interpretive items, interacted with farm animals and received an educational talk from a District ranger. This multisensory, accessible experience served as a successful beginning for future collaboration.

In 2025, the partnership expanded to include two new outings in the spring and summer of 2025 under a \$5,000 contract. Public Affairs worked closely with the District's Visitor Services Interpretation and Education Team to involve docent naturalists in leading these programs. Docents were enthusiastic about finding creative ways to connect participants with the preserves through senses other than sight. One example occurred during a spring 2025 outing at Ravenswood Open Space Preserve, where docent naturalists used a portable speaker to play swallow calls. The recorded sounds attracted real swallows at the preserve, which swooped and circled overhead, allowing participants to hear the birds' live calls and experience the preserve's wildlife in a vivid, multisensory way. This was followed by a second sensory-focused outing at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve around Horseshoe Lake in summer 2025. This program offered a more rural experience with ADA accessible parking and trails. Participants explored the lake's ecology through sound, touch, and environmental cues, reinforcing the value of multisensory interpretation in connecting people with visual impairments to open space.

Vista Center's Mobility Coordinator also collaborated with the District's Planning Department in 2025 to review several trails across multiple preserves. Their expertise helped assess whether these routes may be suitable for future designation as Easy Access Trails, supporting the District's ongoing efforts to expand inclusive recreation opportunities.

Public Affairs renewed the partnership with Vista Center in November 2025 under a new \$8,000 contract to support four new accessible preserve outings in 2026. These programs continue to advance the District's commitment to equitable access and inclusive outdoor experiences. The tentatively scheduled 2026 outings include:

- **March 26, 2026, at Rancho San Antonio** - Walk to Deer Hollow Farm, highlighting farm connections, open space and multisensory engagement opportunities.
- **April 30, 2026, at La Honda Creek, Grasshopper Loop Trail** - A more advanced hike, not fully ADA accessible, limited to approximately seven attendees due to its remote location. The outing will focus on the intersection of open space lands and agriculture, as well as local flora.
- **May 28, 2026, at Skyline Ridge, Horseshoe Lake** - A guided exploration of the preserve's wildlife, lake ecology and natural features.

- **June 25, 2026, at Ravenswood, Bay Trail** - A birding-focused outing with attention to local flora and wetland ecology.

These outings provide a range of experiences that accommodate varying mobility levels while offering meaningful connections to nature.

The renewed 2026 partnership will continue to provide inclusive, community-centered programming that supports individuals with visual impairments in experiencing and enjoying the open space preserves, while deepening their understanding of the District's mission to preserve, protect and restore open space lands.

FISCAL IMPACT

None

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

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

NEXT STEPS

The District will continue its partnership work under the current 2026 contract with Vista Center.

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