



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

La Honda Creek Parking Feasibility Study Public Access Working Group Meeting

MEETING SUMMARY

October 19, 2019

Attachment 1 – Questions and Answers

Sears Ranch Road Stop

1. Is there only one road going to the former residence area (located one mile north of the existing Sears Ranch parking lot)?

There is only one road accessing that site from the existing parking lot. Other ranch roads branch out from that road into the Preserve.

2. Is the Sears Ranch lot an option for the Working Group to consider?

Part of the Board of Directors' (Board's) direction provided on June 12, 2018 was to assess expansion of the existing lot as one alternative to the Red Barn site.

3. Is dog use allowed at Sears Ranch parking area?

Dog use is not currently allowed in the area near the Sears Ranch parking lot. Per the 2012 La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Master Plan (La Honda Master Plan), dogs-on-leash uses would be evaluated for a new loop trail near the Sears Ranch parking lot. As part of this new trail use evaluation, the District would need to coordinate with the grazing tenant to avoid impact to the grazing operation's cows and calves.

4. Will the trail continue to be a trail?

The road/trail that is currently open to the public will continue to be the Harrington Creek Trail. This trail connects the Sears Ranch parking lot to the rest of the Preserve and will remain a trail.

5. Can you explain ranching uses?

The District entered into a lease with a grazing tenant who currently runs a calving operation in the area. The area near the Sears Ranch parking lot is a highly productive pasture for the cattle. Conservation grazing is a tool to help manage vegetative fuel loads and remove invasive weeds that would otherwise require time-consuming manual removal or chemical application.

6. Is the fencing for the pedestrians, to keep them away from the cows? Why isn't there fencing on both sides of the road?

The fence is not to keep hikers away from the cattle; it is used to manage the cattle's access to different pastures. The cattle pass from one pasture area to another through gates in the fences. Hikers are expected to leave gates as they find them – open or closed, so as not to interfere with the grazing tenant's operation. The District provides information to educate people how to conduct themselves around cattle.

<https://www.openspace.org/our-work/projects/hiking-among-grazing-animals>

7. Would expanding the existing lot or adding a new parking area at the Sears Ranch location require widening the driveway for two-way vehicle access?

The District would need to consult with the County of San Mateo (County) on the level of roadway improvements required for the existing driveway if an expansion to the existing lot or new parking area were proposed. Based on prior communications with the County, expansion of the Sears Ranch parking lot, including additional equestrian parking, would likely trigger the need to widen the road. This includes the section of road leading from the Sears Ranch parking lot to the La Honda Elementary School parking lot.

8. Would the access road need more fencing if the former residence area is used as parking?

A new parking lot would need to be outside the grazing area, similar to how the existing lot is situated. If the existing road were used to access a new parking area in the interior of the Preserve, it would need to be fenced to separate cars from the cattle. Currently vehicular traffic is restricted to tenant and District vehicles.

9. How long are the grazing leases?

The terms of grazing leases vary. The lease for this area of the Preserve was for five years with a five-year option to extend.

10. Are there plans for trail access in these pastures?

Yes, the La Honda Master Plan proposes additional phases of trails. The District is currently working on Phase II trails in the vicinity of the Sears Ranch parking lot, and staff will coordinate plans with the grazing tenant.

11. Will there be equestrian parking at Sears Ranch Road Parking lot?

If the parking lot were expanded, accommodating equestrian parking would be studied.

12. Could there be an alternative parking site in the flat area near the road to the residence (tucked into trees) across from the Sears Ranch Road parking lot?

If this location is an alternative recommended by the PAWG and PNR and approved by the Board, it would need to be further analyzed and evaluated.

13. What are the impacts to productive pastures and calving operation?

Minimally, additional fenced off access roads and parking lots within the Preserve will take away productive grazing acreage from the cattle operation, impact how the cattle

are moved on and off the site, and limit how the cattle can move from one side of the access road to the other. The grazing tenant may identify more impacts than those listed here.

14. Is the grazer local?

The grazing tenant is local to the Central Coast area. In addition to this lease, the tenant has leases in the East Bay and Santa Clara County.

15. How does the District choose a grazing tenant?

The District issues a Request for Proposals. The selection process considers applicants' experience, capacity, history, and knowledge, including natural resource management issues, and also considers District policies related to grazing.

16. What was the reason for tearing down the former residence?

When the house was structurally evaluated, it was found to lack a foundation and the walls and flooring were severely degraded. In addition, it was not built to code. It was deemed not feasible to repair the structure.

Red Barn Stop

1. How would public access here work with grazing operations?

For any public access proposal in the Preserve, the District would need to work with the grazing tenants to avoid impacts to their operations.

2. Has the area behind the ranger residence been studied before?

No in-depth study of the area has been done. If this location is an alternative recommended by the PAWG and PNR and approved by the Board, it would need to be further analyzed and evaluated.

3. With the bat roosting in Red Barn, does that mean there's no public access inside the barn?

Yes, there is no public access inside the Red Barn. In addition, a buffer around the exterior of the Red Barn would be established with California Department of Fish and Wildlife input to protect the roosting bat habitat from nearby activities. Any proposed public uses would have to be located outside of this buffer.

4. If the Red Barn site were a permit parking lot, would it still need access through the driveway?

At this time, access to the Red Barn area would still need to be accessed through a driveway onto Highway 84. It would have to be determined whether a new driveway would be required for a permit lot or whether the existing driveways could be used. A permit parking lot would limit the number of vehicles that would be using the parking lot and entering and exiting the highway.

5. Are there plans to paint the Red Barn?

Yes, painting the Red Barn is on the District's work plan in the upcoming year.

Event Center Stop

1. Why is the Event Center trail equestrian only?

The Event Center accommodates many uses on site, such as grazing operations, District field office, and equestrian activities, that do not currently need a use permit from the County. Expanding the use at the site would require a use permit from the County, which is a lengthy process necessitating the development of a site plan for the property. Site planning would be a future effort for this location and would also require an amendment to the La Honda Master Plan.

2. Is the Event Center an option for the Working Group to consider?

Part of the Board's direction provided on June 12, 2018 was to assess public access at the Event Center site as one alternative to the Red Barn site.

3. Is the Event Center open to the public?

Consistent with the historic equestrian uses on the property, the Event Center is currently open to equestrians only. A future site planning process would include establishing uses for the site among other considerations involved in planning a property prior to opening it to the public. Any new uses, such as hiking and biking uses, would be evaluated during that site plan development and this area would be added to the overall La Honda Master Plan, which was completed before the property was acquired. The District would then obtain a use permit from the County during implementation of the site plan, prior to opening the site to the public.

4. The trail past the tunnel under Highway 84 is steep and not ideal for hikers or equestrians – would there be a potential for less steep trail?

Where terrain allows, the District prefers to build trails that average 8% in steepness to improve the hiking experience. It is possible that there is a less steep trail alignment from the tunnel area and that would take further analysis and work with the District trail design and construction experts. There are two nearby residences that would have to be considered as well.

Preserve Gate LH07 (drive by location)

1. Is there a flat area at Gate LH07?

There is a small, narrow, and somewhat flat area just inside the gate to the north. It will require additional analysis regarding the type of site improvements, which may require safety measures, tree removal and grading.

2. Could there be a small permit parking lot here?

It will take further study but potentially this site could accommodate a small parking lot.

3. Are there traffic issues at this location based on prior traffic reports?

Based on the April 26, 2007 Evaluation of Access Constraints and Opportunities Along Highway 84 prepared for the La Honda Master Plan, there are traffic safety issues at this location. The evaluation offered potential solutions to address those issues. It will take further study and coordination with Caltrans to verify what highway improvements are feasible and permissible in this location.

General Questions

1. What is the definition of the center of the Preserve?

The central area of the Preserve is shown on a map labeled “Exhibit 2-4 Preserve Areas” in the La Honda Master Plan. The southerly edge runs approximately east and west from Preserve Gate LH07. The northerly edge runs east and west approximately 0.75 miles north of the Red Barn area.

2. Would the District be willing to purchase the adjacent property south of the Red Barn?

The District is willing to purchase property on a willing seller basis if the property would benefit natural resources or public access or address other needs that the District may have.

3. Is there a residence at the adjacent property south of the Red Barn?

There is a residence on that property.

4. What is a CMU?

Highly unique and sensitive areas can be designated as Conservation Management Units (CMUs). They are managed for resource protection, conservation, and viewshed values. General public access is not allowed in CMUs.

5. Who manages the CMUs?

The District manages the CMUs.

6. Is Allen Road not an option?

Expansion of the Allen Road parking area and an increase in use are not feasible due to a prior agreement with neighbors along this private road that limits vehicular access to ten vehicles per day.

7. Will Caltrans ever put in a bike lane on highway 84?

Caltrans District 4 has recently completed a Bike Plan. Bicycle lanes on Hwy 84 do not appear to be proposed per the mapping tool provided by Caltrans online.
<https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=91f1bb4eb7ff418092977b762b459d01>