



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-20-81
July 28, 2020

AGENDA ITEM 2

AGENDA ITEM

Consideration of the La Honda Public Access Working Group Recommendations that address Board-approved Parking and Trailhead Access Goals at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

Select *one* of the following actions:

- Forward the La Honda Public Access Working Group's recommendations to the full Board of Directors for consideration of approval with any modifications as requested by the Planning and Natural Resources Committee, and recommend that the Working Group be dissolved, and a recognition issued thanking the group for their contributions.

OR

- Direct the Working Group to reconvene to respond to any requests for additional information needed by the Committee.

SUMMARY

On June 26, 2019, the Board of Directors (Board) formed the La Honda Public Access Working Group (PAWG) to evaluate parking and trailhead access options at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Preserve) that meet Board-directed goals and objectives (R-19-85). This project supports Measure AA portfolio 05 La Honda Creek: Upper Area Recreation, Habitat Restoration and Conservation Grazing Projects in the Board-approved 2014 Open Space Vision Plan, which ranked public access to the currently closed middle or central area of the Preserve as one of the top 25 priority actions. The PAWG met almost monthly between August 2019 and March 2020. Moderated by an external facilitator and supported by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) staff, these public meetings covered project orientation, site tours, site alternatives, use options, and iterations of options, culminating with the selection and formal vote of final PAWG recommendations. To meet the project goals and objectives, the PAWG opted for a range of different sites rather than one singular location. The final recommendations disperse visitor access, amenities, and uses across several sites: (1) near the existing Sears Ranch parking area, (2) one mile north from the Sears Ranch parking area, in the interior of the Preserve, (3) at Preserve Gate LH07 off Highway 84, and (4) an area north of the Red Barn and tucked behind existing trees.

DISCUSSION

At the June 12, 2018 special meeting on the Red Barn Public Access Site Plan (R-18-64), the District's Board directed the General Manager to put the project on hold to evaluate alternative parking options and establish a citizens advisory committee. The Board approved the composition of La Honda Public Access Working Group (PAWG) on April 9, 2019 (R-19-39) and formed the PAWG on June 26, 2019 (R-19-85) with the following members.

Member Type	Member
Board Directors (non-voting)	Larry Hassett, Ward 6 Curt Riffle, Ward 4
La Honda area representatives	Ari Delay Karl Lusebrink Kathleen Moazed
Ward 6 stakeholders	Lou Bordi Barbara Hooper
Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 7 stakeholders	Ward 1: Melany Moore Ward 2: Art Heinrich Ward 3: Willie Wool Ward 4: Sandy Sommer Ward 5: Andie Reed Ward 7: Denise Philips

Kicking off on August 22, 2019, the PAWG worked with the facilitator and District staff to assess various sites and options to meet the Board-directed project goals and objectives listed below.

- Establish new public access in the central portion of La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve.
- Design elements to reflect the rural character of the site and the Red Barn.
- Provide safe public access.
- Balance public access with grazing activities and other uses.
- Include amenities that facilitate environmental education.
- Protect scenic views of and from the site.

A summary of the process and recommendations follows. The PAWG's Recommendations Report and Appendices (Attachment 1 – Recommendations Report) include more detail and documentation of the process, meetings, public comments, and recommendations.

Process

District staff developed a workplan for the PAWG, which envisioned a series of six to eight meetings, including opportunities for site visits to various locations in the Preserve and along Highway 84 (Attachment 4 – Attendance, Communications, and Homework). To assist in moderating the meetings and guiding the process, the District procured a facilitator, MIG, Inc., with senior project manager Lou Hexter as the lead facilitator, assisted by associate Ana Padilla. PAWG meetings conformed to the Brown Act, with public notification of the time, location, and agenda provided in advance. There were opportunities for public comment at each meeting, and

members of the public were invited to, and attended, the two site tours as well as all regular PAWG meetings.

The District spent the first two PAWG meetings on **August 22, 2019** and **September 12, 2019** providing background context for the project, including the 2012 La Honda Creek Preserve Master Plan, which laid out the overall vision and anticipated access points for the Preserve.

The District held site tours on **October 19, 2019** and **November 16, 2019** to visit various locations, including areas suggested by PAWG members. Staff developed a naming convention to identify the different sites (Attachment 2 – Site Options Map) and provided the group with typical site assessment criteria with which to evaluate each site. The first tour included visits to the Event Center (Site A), the existing Sears Ranch Road parking lot (Site B1), a flat area near a former residence one mile into the Preserve from the existing Sears Ranch Road lot (Site C1), and two locations suggested by a PAWG member near the Red Barn (Sites E1 and E2). On their second tour, the PAWG visited locations suggested by PAWG members, including Preserve Gate LH07 (Site D) and two additional sites near the Sears Ranch Road area (Sites B2 and C2). The second tour culminated in a 1.5-hour, 2-mile round trip hike from Site C1 northward along a closed portion of existing road to a gate near La Honda Creek just below Site D. PAWG members had the opportunity to experience the distance, natural scenery, and topography from the former residence area to the vicinity of La Honda Creek as part of this hike. On both tours, PAWG members used site assessment forms to record their observations.

During the **December 12, 2019** and **February 6, 2020 meetings**, PAWG members shared their observations of each site's attributes, citing how well they thought each location performed relative to the Board-directed project goals and objectives. At these meetings, the PAWG discussed additional sites – one near the Sears Ranch Road parking lot (Site B3) and two near the Red Barn (Sites E3 and E4). District staff also presented a list of “other options and iterations” that included limited access and a geographic distribution of uses across several sites (rather than accommodating all desired uses at one location). At the conclusion of the **February 6, 2020 meeting**, the District project team provided three example combinations of sites, with varying degrees of access and a geographic distribution of uses, as different “sample suites of options.” These combinations illustrated examples of how to package a suite of distributed uses, limited access, and sites into potential proposals that could be advanced to the Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee and to jumpstart PAWG discussions of what other combinations might appeal to the group.

In between meetings, the PAWG completed homework assignments, which included reviewing background materials, visiting and observing different sites, and documenting their individual assessments of the locations under study (Attachment 4 – Attendance, Communications, and Homework). There were also opportunities for members to suggest their own ideas for potential access locations; in particular, Sites B2, B3, C2, D, E1, E2 and E4 were suggested by PAWG members for consideration. Site E3 was offered by District staff after they discovered the site as a possible location while obtaining video footage of the Red Barn area. The PAWG evaluated how limited access and distributed use options could work for each site to meet the project goals and objectives.

The PAWG considered public input as they comprehensively evaluated each of the following sites (for additional details, please refer to Attachment 1 – Recommendations Report and Appendices):

1. Former Event Center – south end of Preserve
 - Site A – vicinity of existing equestrian permit parking area
2. Sears Ranch Road parking lot
 - Site B1 – expansion of the existing lot
 - Site B2 – area opposite existing lot, across driveway
 - Site B3 – area at Gate LH15
3. Sears Ranch Road interior area – one mile north of existing lot
 - Site C1 – open area (site of former residence), past first interior gate
 - Site C2 – former corral area adjacent to Site C1
4. Preserve Gate LH07 – south of the Red Barn
 - Site D – area at gate and parallel to highway
5. Red Barn area
 - Site E1 – knoll west of existing ranger residence
 - Site E2 – former corral area west of and downhill from Red Barn
 - Site E3 – area south of and downhill from existing ranger residence
 - Site E4 – area north of existing ranger residence

The PAWG evaluated the following limited access and use distribution options:

- Access via permit only (*would not apply to sites already open to the public*)
- Access via docent-led activities (*would not apply to sites already open to the public*)
- Distribution or separation of uses among various sites
 - *Educational or interpretive elements*
 - *Picnic or family-oriented elements*
 - *Restroom access*
 - *Equestrian access*
 - *Dog access*

At its **March 5, 2020 meeting**, the PAWG considered the three sample suites of options offered by the District, along with other suites proposed by PAWG members, prepared as part of their homework assignment before the meeting. PAWG discussions about the suitability and challenges associated with specific sites within each suite, along with nominal voting to identify preferred locations, led to the removal of some sites from further consideration and an emerging “hybrid” suite of potential sites and access options. The PAWG deliberated and voted on the final recommended suite to forward to the PNR Committee for its consideration (Attachment 3 – draft March 5th meeting summary).

Recommendations

The PAWG arrived at a key finding and principle that no one location could meet all of the project goals and objectives and provide all of the desired access and functions. Thus, the

PAWG began to discuss “suites” or combinations of options, that is, a set of uses, amenities, and parking and trailhead access facilities distributed across multiple locations. As described above, staff presented this concept early in the deliberations, and the specific recommendation of the PAWG flowed from an evaluation of the potential uses, amenities, and facilities at each location under study. The PAWG identified the sites that the majority of the group felt warranted further evaluation in the feasibility study phases.

Voting members of the PAWG voted (7 in favor; 2 opposed) to advance the following recommendations to the PNR Committee for consideration in the feasibility study phase that together, taken as a whole, meet the Board-directed project goals and objectives:

- **Sites B2 or B3 – Sears Ranch Road Lot:** Parking for equestrian trailers and future expansion for additional vehicles (size to be determined by physical and other constraints) when use of existing lot exceeds its capacity
- **Sites C1 or C2 – Sears Ranch Road Interior:** Picnic, family-friendly, equestrian-serving and interpretive amenities (type, location, and quantity to be determined during feasibility study phase)
- **Site D – Preserve Gate LH07:** A small parking lot (size to be determined by physical and other constraints during feasibility study phase) with trailhead access and restroom facilities
- **Site E3 – Red Barn Area:** A small parking lot (size to be determined by physical and other constraints), with limited access (specific constraints to be determined during feasibility study phase; potential options include permit only/docent-led only conditions)

Pending PNR Committee review and Board approval, the District would secure the services of technical experts to initiate a detailed analysis of the proposed site uses and develop high-level conceptual plans for each location as part of the feasibility study.

FISCAL IMPACT

The recommended action has no immediate fiscal impact. Funds to complete the PAWG’s work and initiate the feasibility study phase are included in the adopted Fiscal Year 2020-21 (FY21) budget. The feasibility study would be initiated after the PNR Committee forwards a final recommendation to the full Board and where the Board considers and approves the recommended study sites.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item is coming to the PNR Committee for review and consideration, consistent with the review process approved by the Board.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Additional notice was provided to residences along the Highway 84 area between Highway 35 to Highway 1, Preserve grazing tenants, neighbors living adjacent to the Preserve, and parties interested in the Preserve, the Red Barn, and the La Honda Creek Master Plan.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). As stated in the 2012 La Honda Creek Preserve Master Plan and Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration, additional environmental review will be conducted for a new staging area (or areas) at the appropriate time. Environmental review would begin once the project description is further defined.

NEXT STEPS

If supported by the PNR Committee, the General Manager will direct the District project team to forward the item to the Board for consideration of approval, incorporating comments received from the PNR Committee, to advance the project into the feasibility study phase.

Alternatively, if the PNR Committee requires additional information from the PAWG, the General Manager will direct the District project team to reconvene the PAWG to discuss PAWG responses to Committee comments or requests for additional information. The PAWG's revised and final Recommendations Report would then be brought back to the PNR Committee at a subsequent meeting for further consideration.

Attachments

1. La Honda Public Access Working Group Recommendations Report and Appendices
2. Site Options Map, Aerials and Photographs
3. March 5, 2020 Draft PAWG Meeting Summary
4. PAWG Attendance, Communications, and Homework Summary
5. Public Comments (received after March 5, 2020 and prior to July 16, 2020)
6. PAWG Communication (received after March 5, 2020 and prior to July 16, 2020)

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