



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

# Memorandum

DATE: January 10, 2024

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ana Ruiz".

FROM: Jane Mark, Planning Manager, Gretchen Laustsen, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Highway 35 North Ridge Parking Area Expansion Project Delivery Streamlining

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At their November 8, 2023 meeting, the Board of Directors approved the feasibility study and conceptual designs for the Highway 35 Multi-use Trail Crossing and North Ridge Parking Expansion Project (North Ridge Project) at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (Purisima, Preserve). Next steps for the North Ridge Project include further detailed design and environment review as part of the Purisima Comprehensive Use and Management Plan (CUMP). The CUMP will incorporate the North Ridge Project and a suite of other proposed new public access improvements and resource and land management activities planned for the Preserve, including recommended actions for the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail and Parking Area, Purisima Multimodal Access Implementation, and Irish Ridge Restoration Projects. The CUMP would serve as the basis (complete project description) to conduct environmental review to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which must be completed to initiate the permitting process. The Board directed staff to evaluate the feasibility of separating the North Ridge Project from the CUMP to expedite the construction of the North Ridge Project ahead of the other Purisima projects.

***Based on staff's evaluation, the General Manager intends to proceed with the most expedient and cost-effective approach, as follows: (a) initiate CEQA review earlier during the Design Development phase (35% design) and (b) separate the Caltrans permitting for the North Ridge parking area from the trail crossing at Highway 35.*** This modified approach would result in project implementation starting in Fiscal Year 2026-27, which would be the earliest to construct due to permitting and construction occurring within the typical April through October dry season window. Separating the North Ridge parking area from the CUMP unfortunately does not result in earlier implementation given that additional detailed design is necessary for the North Ridge parking area to inform the CEQA analysis. CEQA review for the North Ridge Project would therefore not be ready until summer 2024, when the CUMP CEQA review is already scheduled to proceed.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Staff evaluated several scenarios to expedite the North Ridge Project, including conducting a separate environmental review, initiating the environmental review process at an earlier stage in design, and submitting separate permit applications for the parking area and the trail crossing. This memorandum summarizes the findings of the evaluation.

### *Scenario 1: Separate Environmental Review (not recommended)*

Staff evaluated separating the North Ridge Project from the CUMP scope and schedule to expedite CEQA review. Staff compared potential North Ridge Project schedules under the CUMP versus a separate and standalone environment review approach. The North Ridge Project schedule with a separate environmental review process is substantially unchanged because the environmental review process would still have to run concurrently with the design process. The other Purisima projects are further along, having initiated design development in the fall of 2023, while design development for the North Ridge Project is scheduled to begin in spring of 2024. As a reminder, only a high-level conceptual design is available at this time for the North Ridge Parking Project. More detailed designs are necessary to inform the CEQA analysis and answer the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration questions.

### *Scenario 2: Initiate Environmental Review Earlier during Design Development (Recommended)*

Staff also evaluated initiating the environmental analysis earlier in the North Ridge Project schedule. Typically, the District uses 65% design plans to inform the environmental analysis based on more defined grading quantities, length of construction timeline, and type of construction equipment. For the North Ridge Project, staff recommend using the 35% design plans to initiate the environmental analysis as the project site is already located within a relatively developed area (existing parking area with multiple onsite structures and facilities), which reduces the risk of requiring significant design changes as the design moves from a 35% to 65% plan set.

### *Scenario 3: Separate Permitting Processes (Recommended)*

Staff also considered permitting scenarios that may shorten the overall schedule without conducting a separate CEQA review. Typically, the permitting phase of a project is a substantial portion of the overall schedule, and the District has limited ability to control the associated timeline. Because Caltrans approval of the Highway 35 trail crossing may require more time than the parking area expansion, staff propose submitting separate Caltrans permit applications for these two North Ridge Project elements. This approach could provide flexibility to implement the parking area expansion ahead of the trail highway crossing, particularly if the permit timeline associated with trail crossing misses the spring/summer construction window. Note that this approach could increase permitting and implementation costs due to two separate construction contracts and associated mobilization costs.

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