



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

**MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT
PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Administrative Office
5050 El Camino Real
Los Altos, CA 94022

Tuesday, September 17, 2024

DRAFT MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kersteen-Tucker called the meeting of the Planning and Natural Resources Committee to order at 1:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members present: Craig Gleason, Karen Holman, Zoe Kersteen-Tucker

Members absent: None

Staff present: General Manager Ana Ruiz, General Counsel Hilary Stevenson, Assistant General Manager Susanna Chan, Assistant General Manager Brian Malone, Chief Financial Officer Stefan Jaskulak, District Clerk/Assistant to the General Manager Maria Soria, Executive Assistant/Deputy District Clerk Shaylynn Nelson, Executive Assistant/Deputy District Clerk Stephanie Gross, Senior Planner Tina Hugg, Planner III Ashley Mac,

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion: Director Holman moved, and Director Gleason seconded the motion to adopt the agenda.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 3-0-0

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Deputy District Clerk Shaylynn Nelson reported there were no public speakers for this item.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

1. Hawthorns Area Plan – Public Access Working Group Recommendations (R-24-115)

Senior Planner Tina Hugg introduced Planner III Ashley Mac, who is also co-managing the project, along with the team’s consultants, Traffic Engineer Andrew Lee from Parametrix and Landscape Architect Paul Stevenson from CSW|ST2. Also in attendance were the two co-chairs Helen Quinn and Rachel Oslund. She reported that the Public Access Working Group (PAWG) held their last meeting on June 13, 2024 and staff is requesting for the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (Committee) to approve their last meeting summary, which both PAWG co-chairs reviewed.

Motion: Director Gleason moved, and Director Holman seconded the motion to approve the June 13, 2024, PAWG meeting summary.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 3-0-0

Ms. Hugg continued the presentation and provided a project overview. The project is located at the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve in the Town of Portola Valley (Town). The property consists of 79 acres and is surrounded by commercial and residential properties. The Hawthorns Area has been closed to the public since the District received the property in 2011 and is subject to a conservation easement held by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) that seeks to protect the property’s natural and conservation values by establishing development parameters, which guide how to provide public access. She stated that the purpose of the Hawthorns Area Plan is to provide a comprehensive use and management plan that prescribes long-term uses for the land and resource management activities and establishes a pathway towards opening the property to public access. Ms. Hugg then reviewed the project’s five phases, the vision, the six Board-approved goals, and the PAWG’s formation and process, including their purpose and charge. She stated that staff is looking to attain the Committee’s direction and guidance for the next steps, which would be for staff to present to the Town of Portola Valley, including the Town’s Ad Hoc Committee and a joint meeting of the Town Planning Commission and Town Council. Staff would then return at a study session of the Board to present the PAWG’s recommendations along with the Committee’s and Town’s feedback. The Board would then make the final policy decision on the conceptual designs at a future meeting.

Ms. Mac continued the presentation and provided an overview of the year-long process of the seven PAWG meetings. She shared the PAWG’s recommendations include two parking area location options and a loop trail with trail connections to the Town trails. The recommendations include bicycle, equestrian, dog-on-leash, and hiking access designations for each trail segment. Additionally, the recommendations are aligned with an existing conservation easement that overlays the property. She pointed out that the section of the Alpine Trail segment along the Hawthorns property does not allow bikes, and that Town approval would be required to change the use on the trail and close the gap on this Safe Route to School. Ms. Mac further explained that the PAWG recommended a phased approach to re-evaluate trail segments 16 and 17 in the future, after the Hawthorns is open to the public and the level of usage levels is assessed. If either of segments 16 or 17 connections to Sweet Springs Trail are built, the PAWG recommends all uses excepts bikes. Permission to connect to the Sweet Springs Trail would need concurrence with the Portola Valley Ranch community and involvement of the Town. In addition, the PAWG

recommends two parking alternatives - options 9 and 10, and supports up to 50 parking spaces and a phased approach if it is feasible. Ms. Mac reported that the PAWG evaluated parking options 1-4 and 5-8. Staff heard that traffic safety, natural resources considerations, and aesthetics were the main priorities of the PAWG, which led to options 9 and 10.

Director Gleason asked to clarify what can or cannot be done with the conservation easement in regard to parking option 10 and tree removal.

Ms. Mac explained that POST confirmed that the PAWG's recommendations align with the intent of the conservation easement. With this confirmation, Option 10 was discussed and ultimately selected. She noted that in the next phase of design, consultants will study tree removal in more detail.

Director Gleason asked whether the inclusion of bikes on Alpine Trail is something that the Town would independently want to do.

Ms. Hugg stated that the Town has indicated a desire for the trail to become a safe route for school children.

Director Holman inquired whether the parking options 9 or 10 could be shifted to the west to avoid some tree removal.

Mr. Stevenson responded that grading will still be needed for the driveway if the parking shifts over. Further study is needed to determine if it is possible to reduce the number of trees removed.

Director Holman requested more information on how the number of 50 parking stalls was determined.

Mr. Lee explained that parking counts were conducted at seven other nearby preserves and trailheads. Based on the amount of occupancy during the weekdays and weekends, the relative size of the preserves and types of uses that are allowed, it was estimated a range between 25 to 68 parking spaces would be needed. Since parking demand largely depend on time of day, day of the week, and season, 50 parking spaces was selected as an approximate midpoint number. In addition, due to its connectivity to regional trails, there will be opportunities to hike beyond Hawthorns.

Director Holman voiced her preference not to have any retaining walls.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked about visibility from Alpine Road and also if Parking Option 10 could be moved to remove less trees.

Mr. Stevenson noted that Option 10 would be less visible, and landforms would partially hide the parking area. There may be tradeoffs if the parking is moved, as it will shift into the knoll area, where there is steeper grading and a potential for walls. Further study is needed.

Director Gleason asked if the Board at the upcoming spring meeting would decide on staged implementation of parking. For example, to build 35 parking spaces with the capacity to increase to 50.

Ms. Hugg confirmed but cautioned that for CEQA purposes the full amount would be studied. In addition, it would be shared with the Town to show the phased approach.

General Manager Ana Ruiz added that the Town may have requirements for the number of parking spaces needed due to their concerns regarding parking and possible overflow parking impacts to Alpine Road and the commercial area across the street.

Director Holman asked if there was any discussion about forgoing parking and allowing walk-in, bike-in, or ride-in access only and suggested that the money saved from not building the parking lot could be allocated towards monitoring Alpine Road and monitoring parking for the businesses so that they are not impacted.

Ms. Hugg confirmed there was a discussion, and comments were received both in favor of and against parking.

Ms. Ruiz added that there are concerns from residents, including those from the Portola Valley Ranch community, about people parking within their area and streets, and noted that if there is no parking for people who drive in, it will likely impact the local residents.

Director Holman asked if there was discussion about sharing parking facilities with Alpine Hills Tennis and Swimming Club.

Planning Manager Jane Mark reported that staff reached out to Alpine Hills Tennis and Swimming Club to inquire if the District could stage parking for a tour of the Hawthorn Area and the request was denied. However, the question has not been asked to use it for long-term parking.

Ms. Quinn stated the problem with Alpine Hills Tennis and Swimming Club is that it has the same peak use times as the preserve. It is often not at capacity, but it is at capacity on Saturday and Sunday mornings when people visit the preserve. She explained that the PAWG suggested 50 parking spaces due to pressure from the Town with the concern about overflow and noted that the preserve is not just for the people who live in Portola Valley, but it is a preserve for the region and therefore it needs parking for those out of the region. This was discussed at the PAWG, and the idea of no parking was rejected for that reason.

Director Holman commented she was pleased that the PAWG selected options 9 and 10 since the other recommendations were not as attractive.

Public comment opened at 2:07 p.m.

Dave Polkinhorne voiced his concern that POST accepted to modify the easement for the parking. He requested clarification on the legal process of any modifications to the easement, including if there is a public review period, and who approves such changes. He also noted that his preliminary review of the easement suggests that grading and tree removal are prohibited and emphasized the importance of fully adhering to the easement terms. He expressed concern over adapting the site and making it available for everyone, and that design decisions should respect the site's limitations and that the primary goal should not be to bend it to adjust it for some, even if that means limited or no parking options.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked staff for clarification on the notion of bending or flexing the conservation easement.

Ms. Hugg stated that POST is not amending the conservation easement. They are reviewing the PAWG recommendations in alignment with the conservation easement's intent. The conservation easement allows for public access and recreation.

John Keller, speaking as the President of the Portola Valley Ranch Association (Ranch) that borders the west edge of Hawthorns and abuts a large part of the property along Sweet Springs Trail, commented that he convened a special meeting of his Board to elicit comments from the residents and his Board on the two parking proposals. Resident concerns largely focus on safety, given the area's heavy traffic, especially at the nearby busy intersection. In his opinion, the entry point at what is the current three-way intersection is particularly unsafe for a variety of reasons and emphasized that safety should be prioritized in any decision-making.

Duf Sundheim, Vice-President of the Ranch, commented that the Ranch spoke about their concerns that legal rights need to be addressed and noted that there is considerable resident opposition. The Ranch seeks to understand the rules and laws pertaining to the project. He pointed out that there is a fence between the Hawthorns and the Ranch and that there is no access from the Hawthorns to the Ranch without the Ranch's consent. Additionally, the trail is designated for only equestrian use, and if the Town wishes to modify the terms of the easement, that land is owned by the Ranch and an easement was granted to the Town. He spoke about his concerns about the easement's maintenance requirements, which have not been kept by the Town. There are also insurance requirements, and the Ranch has not been provided with any proof that the insurance is intact. He stated that the Ranch would like to be cooperative and be engaged. Lastly, he stressed that Roberts Market has not been contacted and this project will directly affect them.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked when and how additional stakeholder engagement will happen.

Ms. Hugg stated that the PAWG and project team received public comments during the PAWG's meetings to help develop the current options presented to the Committee. However, the PAWG's recommendations are only ideas at the moment and the project team needs input and guidance from the Committee on these recommendations before continuing engagement efforts with the community and Town.

Charles Maroney, a Portola Valley Ranch resident, reported that he organized a petition signed by 95 Ranch residents opposing connections to Sweet Springs Trail. He noted that trail segment 17 passes through a viewshed visible to a dozen private homes, with clear sightlines between the homes and the trail. He suggested the Committee walk this segment to observe the visibility issues. He also expressed concern about the high volume of users on Sweet Springs Trail.

Due to technical issues, the Committee recessed at 2:26 p.m. and reconvened at 2:35 p.m.

Kristi Corley spoke about her concerns that residents have a single road in Portola Valley on Alpine Road for evacuations either for wildfire or an earthquake. She emphasized that Alpine Road has a 75-foot scenic setback requirement and noted that the proposed parking is placed only 60 feet back, requesting further explanation on the setback and if it has been approved by the Town. She commented the community's preference for natural views over visible parking

spaces and stressed the importance of effective screening. She also expressed concern over the increase from 35 to 50 parking spaces, noting that added traffic could increase their existing evacuation issue. She also referenced Windy Hill's parking lot and suggested having a permeable surface because the pavement runoff could impact Los Trancos Creek.

Karen Askey, a Portola Valley resident as well as PAWG member, asked for clarification if the upcoming Study Session would take place with the three bodies (Portola Valley Town Council, Planning Commission and the Town Hawthorns Ad Hoc Committee) meeting together or separately and whether the dates have been set for these meetings. She also requested to incorporate a design on the Alpine Trail widening, illustrating how that would work when presenting to the Town. She expressed her concerns about the parking constraints in Portola Valley due to the success of the Alpine Inn and Windy Hill, which has caused overflow of parking which the residents are extremely sensitive about. There have been a number of safety issues that have already occurred. She also noted that the Alpine Hill Tennis and Swimming Club has increased membership and number of events. Their parking lot is full in the summer, and they do use the lot for overflow parking.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked if staff would like to address the questions asked.

Ms. Hugg explained the meetings will be held separately and staff is working with the Town to schedule the meetings. Regarding Alpine Road Trail, it needs to be discussed with the Town. It is in early planning stages, and while initial ideas have been explored with the PAWG, no formal alignment has been drawn. She stated that the Town liaison Sarah Wernikoff confirmed that Town's 75-foot scenic setback only applies to structures, like restrooms, and that the setback does not apply to pavement portions of parking areas.

Dave Polkinhorne asked who makes the deciding vote if the District and the Town reaches an impasse and asked for the process to be explained.

General Counsel Hilary Stevenson highlighted that the District has a longstanding history of successfully working with local jurisdictions across two counties and 17 cities to complete permitting for various projects, including parking lots, facilities and other amenities. She noted that while the District is an independent special district with authority to manage its lands, it collaborates closely with the relevant cities and counties to meet their permitting requirements. She expressed confidence that, based on past experience, the District and the Town would be able to reach an agreement without needing arbitration.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker acknowledged the concern raised and commented that the Board aims to avoid any situations that would require escalation. She noted that one reason for convening a PAWG is to foster collaboration and ensure the District remains a good neighbor. The District values community input and is committed to developing plans, designs, and projects that accommodate the needs of as many people as possible.

Lana Norris spoke about her concerns that what is being considered does not comply with the terms of the easement. She iterated from a previous commenter that tree and grading are prohibited by the terms of the easement and noted that both options 9 and 10 would require grading. She inquired how this came about since POST does not have the authority to waive any specific elements of the easement and requested clarification on how the District attained

POST's approval. She spoke about the PAWG voting process and noted that a PAWG member voted neutral for segment 4 and that the process was allowed to go forward, therefore there was no majority support for segments 16 and 17 and asked to take this into consideration when looking at the numbers.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked staff if they would like to address the public's comments about the easement, tree removal and trail segments 16 and 17.

Ms. Stevenson stated that the conservation easement was granted with a clear intention to allow public access, including provisions for a parking lot, as outlined in the easement document. This reflects the original intentions of the easement. The District and POST have conferred and cooperated throughout the process, and he is confident that the plans being presented align with the intent of the conservation easement.

Ms. Ruiz stated that if the Board includes trail segments 16 and 17 now as part of a future phase, the required CEQA environmental review can cover them. This approach would not guarantee implementation but would leave the option open, contingent on further checkpoints and agreements.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked her colleagues if they are comfortable with the recommendation of the PAWG or if there are any other checks that they may want to put on any future approvals of the two trail segments if they are brought into existence, noting that she was comfortable with the recommendation.

Director Gleason commented that it may be difficult to make a decision on the proposed connections at this time. Without clear data on how many people might use the trail, especially the connection to the Sweet Springs trail. He agreed with the Ms. Ruiz's suggestion to include these segments in the environmental review as a potential future phase. This approach would not commit the District to any immediate action but would provide valuable information for future decision-making. He supported the recommendation, emphasizing the need for more data before making a final decision.

Director Holman stated that she is also comfortable with the recommendation and requested for staff to conduct additional research for when this item is presented to the Board to see if there is any place in Portola Valley that is within a reasonable distance for shared parking opportunities. Additionally, she would like to have noted that the retaining walls are a placeholder and not assumed, and that they will be addressed in the future.

Ms. Nelson informed Chair Kersteen-Tucker that there was an additional online comment and asked if she would allow it. Chair Kersteen-Tucker and the other Directors allowed the comment.

Ms. Corley commented that she forwarded Ms. Hugg a C/CAG traffic report that was conducted for Portola Valley and Alpine Road. She inquired if the reason why the trees removal is necessary is for fire truck turnaround. Additionally, she noted that equestrians have been requesting for horses to be allowed on the trails, but have yet to see any access for horses, and noted that the community is also asking for an off-leash dog area. She pointed out that Option 10 would go through the school routes and school children will be walking past that driveway and

believes it is important to continue talking with the Town. Lastly, she suggested that the District should hold another entire town meeting to provide an update.

Public comment closed at 3:10 p.m.

Chair Kersteen-Tucker asked for staff to provide Ms. Corley responses to her questions offline.

Director Gleason recommended that staff present all of the safety information to the Board at the study session, including the recent public comments and questions. He noted that each option likely has aspects which raise safety concerns and it would be easier for the Board to consider as a whole to understand the full context and how each safety concern relates to the other options. He also asked in the future to consider the methodology of voting and how the neutral votes are counted or not counted.

Motion: Director Gleason moved, and Director Holman seconded the motion to approve the next step of presenting the recommendations with any modifications requested by the Planning and Natural Resources Committee to the Portola Valley Ad Hoc Hawthorns Committee, Portola Valley Town Council, and Portola Valley Planning Commission for feedback before bringing the PAWG recommendations and Town and public input to a Study Session of the Board of Directors. If supported, this next step will be communicated to the Board of Directors in an FYI Memorandum.

ROLL CALL VOTE: 3-0-0

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Kersteen-Tucker adjourned the meeting of the Planning and Natural Resources Committee at 3:16 p.m.

Stephanie Gross, Deputy District Clerk
Maria Soria, District Clerk