



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-24-122
Meeting 24-27
October 9, 2024

AGENDA ITEM 4

AGENDA ITEM

Informational Presentation on the Hawthorns Historic Complex Lower Barn Partnership Feasibility Work

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *see above*

Receive an informational presentation on the feasibility work for the partnership to re-use the Hawthorns Historic Complex Lower Barn. No formal Board action is required.

SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) is planning for the future use and management of the Hawthorns Historic Complex (Historic Complex). The Board of Directors (Board) formed a Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee (Ad Hoc Committee) during the September 13, 2023 Board meeting ([R-23-103](#)) to review and guide the District's development of preliminary use and management ideas for the Historic Complex. In response to an unanticipated and valuable partnership opportunity related to the Historic Complex, the Ad Hoc Committee shifted their attention in early 2024 to explore a partnership opportunity to specifically rehabilitate and re-use the Lower Barn as programming space for both the public and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities or delays. At this October 9, 2024 Board meeting, the Board will review the feasibility work conducted to date on the Lower Barn and the next steps with the partnership opportunity. The District is targeting January 2025 for when this item would return to the Board for a decision on whether to pursue the Lower Barn partnership opportunity by directing the General Manager and General Counsel to prepare the terms and conditions of a partnership agreement.

DISCUSSION

Preserve Background

The 79-acre Hawthorns Area, which is located within the Town of Portola Valley, was gifted to the District in 2011 and is currently closed to the public in accordance with the Preliminary Use and Management Plan (PUMP) (R-06-53). The PUMP remains effective until the plan is amended or a new comprehensive use and management plan for the area is prepared.

The Hawthorns Historic Complex is an approximately 13-acre area located within the Hawthorns Area. The Historic Complex was once the site of a year-round family residence, summer retreat, and small-scale agricultural operation with structures that date back to the late 1800s. In 2013, the District retained Knapp Architects to prepare a [Historic Resource Study](#) for the Hawthorns Area, which concluded that the property is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district because it retains landscape features and structures that reflect the

social, agricultural, and architectural history of San Francisco Peninsula estate property from the late 19th century.

Hawthorns Area Plan

In 2021, the District initiated a multi-year planning process to develop the Hawthorns Area Plan in alignment with Board policy 4.01, *Open Space Use and Management Planning Process*. Engaging members of the public and community, the Town of Portola Valley, District staff, and the Board, the Hawthorns Area Plan will serve as a comprehensive use and management plan guiding resource, public access, and land management actions on the property. The Hawthorns Area Plan is currently in the Programming/Conceptual Planning phase.

Historic Complex Planning

While the Hawthorns Area Plan will provide overarching guidance on resource, public access, and land management actions at the Hawthorns Area, planning for the specific future use and management of the Historic Complex is not included in the Area Plan planning process and is a separate and parallel planning project that started in late 2023 (Attachment 1). The Board formed the Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee (Ad Hoc Committee) during the September 13, 2023 Board meeting ([R-23-103](#)) to review and guide the development of preliminary use and management ideas for the Historic Complex. Recognizing the Historic Complex is a unique resource within the Hawthorns Area, the Ad Hoc Committee recommended a separate vision statement and goals for the Historic Complex that complement the overall Hawthorns Area Vision Statement and Goals ([R-22-45](#)), but specifically guide the future use and management of the Historic Complex. The Historic Complex Vision Statement and Goals were approved by the Board on August 28, 2024 ([R-24-109](#)).

Board-approved Historic Complex Vision Statement

The vision for the Hawthorns Historic Complex is to implement a fiscally sustainable plan, including clean-up, rehabilitation, and long-term operations and maintenance, that allows the site's cultural significance to be understood and safely enjoyed by the public, provides a location for the public to learn about environmental resources, and remains within the District's mission.

Board-approved Historic Complex Goals

1. Integrate with the Hawthorns Area Plan and its vision and goals.
2. Manage structures and landscape features in the Historic Complex in consideration of the federal guidelines for the treatment of historic properties and consistent with the ¹Conservation Easement.
3. Balance the potential uses, improvements, and programs for the Historic Complex with the District's Mission, where future uses would achieve multiple goals.
4. Balance long-term financial and operational sustainability with potential benefits.
5. Through partnerships, connect with the community to advance the District's diversity, equity and inclusion goals.
6. Ensure safe access, guided by the District's Good Neighbor Policy, for the public to view and learn about the site's history and stories, and incorporate interpretive elements throughout the site.
7. Engage with Indigenous groups to explore opportunities for advancing the understanding of Indigenous history around the Hawthorns Area and Portola Valley.
8. Consider housing, either short-term or long-term, that supports the District's mission.
9. Incorporate the Historic Complex holistically within the overall Hawthorns Area Plan.

Historic Complex Partnership Opportunity

The Board Ad Hoc Committee has been exploring future use and management ideas for the Historic Complex. Through this exploration process, the Ad Hoc Committee met with a potential partner in Portola Valley, Jim and Patty White, with whom the District has engaged in previous discussions regarding potential reuse of the Historic Complex. The District was first introduced to Jim and Patty White in 2017 as interested and viable partners for the Historic Complex. They emerged after a prior and unsuccessful attempt to identify potential community partners through a 2014 Request for Letters of Interest (RLOI) solicitation. The Whites were previously interested in re-use of the Hawthorns mansion as a residential facility for adults with intellectual or developmental delays. Due to cost and permitting challenges in adapting the structures to meet their residential facility goals and timeline, the Whites shifted their residential project site to an adjacent property located at 4388 Alpine Road (known as Willow Commons) across Alpine Road from the Hawthorns Area. Their 13-unit residential facility is currently under construction. In addition, the Whites have also worked to house additional people with intellectual or developmental delays in other residences within Portola Valley.

As part of a future phase of development for the Willow Commons complex, the Whites are exploring programming space options for current residents and potentially residents housed in future additional residential units. In early 2024, the Whites expressed interest in partnering with the District on the potential rehabilitation and re-use of the Lower Barn, a large 4,500 square feet, one-story structure with gabled roof and vertical board-and-batten siding, as a programmed community space. Programming is still conceptual but may entail use of the barn as a community studio space for creative art projects inspired by the natural surroundings. Discussions indicate an overlap of shared values and goals between the District and the Whites that could potentially be achieved through a partnership. In order for the Whites to arrive at decision points for their planning efforts for the next phase of the Willow Commons development, they seek a partnership commitment from the District by January 2025. A partnership to rehabilitate and reuse the barn would need to explore both public-private funding to repair and prepare the barn for programming and sustain the ongoing operation of a long-term community program that involve residents of Willow Commons and other assistance homes and provide a larger public benefit.

High-level Feasibility Analysis Preliminary Results

In light of an emerging viable partnership potential for the Lower Barn with the Whites, the Ad Hoc Committee and project team redirected planning efforts starting in the Spring of 2024 to conduct a high-level feasibility analysis for this potential partnership opportunity. The feasibility analysis was conducted to confirm the permitting process and constructability of repairs and improvements to the Lower Barn. The focus of the analysis and preliminary results are included in the table below:

Topic	Preliminary Results
Compatibility with the Conservation Easement held by Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)	Proposed programming use and associated infrastructure are potentially compatible but will require additional consultation with POST. POST will continue to evaluate proposed uses for consistency with the conservation easement and associated infrastructure as the ideas become more refined.

Permitting and Approval Process with the Town of Portola Valley	The District is scheduled to present the project to the Town Planning Commission at their study session anticipated in October for input.
Architectural, Code, and Structural Engineering	Preservation and rehabilitation of the Lower Barn are feasible from a historic and structural standpoint.
Geotechnical Investigation for a new foundation	Building a new foundation is feasible from a soils and geology standpoint with a proposed design that is not anticipated to be prohibitively expensive.
Programming Development	Initial ideas include using the Lower Barn for day-use art programs for adults with disabilities, with opportunities for the general public to participate.
Partnership Agreement Terms	To facilitate the accelerated feasibility analysis, the District started discussions with Jim and Patty White on initial rehabilitation and ongoing operations and maintenance responsibilities that provide the basis for potential terms of a partnership agreement.
Parking and Access	Initial concept includes limited permit parking (10-15 spaces, including accessible parking) for staff and visitors. Day-use participants from Willow Commons do not generally drive and would be transported to the site via shuttle. Transportation by individual cars would be primarily limited to staff members and instructors. The small lot would also provide accessible parking for the general public when programs or the site are open to the public.

Big Rocks for FY2025 Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP)

At the June 12, 2024 public hearing for the Fiscal Year 2024-25 (FY25) budget and three-year (Fiscal Year 2024-25 to 2026-27) CIAP, the Board of Directors approved the highest priority “Big Rocks” list of projects for FY25 ([R-24-76](#)). The Hawthorns Historic Complex Partnership project was not identified as a priority on the Big Rocks project list. However, the same Project Manager who is leading the Historic Complex Partnership development is also leading the Skyline Field Office (SFO) Renovation, which is a priority on the Big Rocks project list.

Due to the need for the District to determine whether or not there would be a viable partnership with the Whites by February 2025, the Board Ad Hoc Committee requested that District staff expedite the programming and assessment of the Lower Barn so that staff can present the findings and recommendations and a draft partnership agreement to the full Board of Directors in January 2025. This expedited timeline for high level rapid assessment and feasibility work and securing Board input required the Project Manager to invest additional time and effort into the Historic Complex project. In order to complete both the Historic Complex partnership development and concurrently complete the scope and maintain an already compressed timeline

for the SFO Renovation project, additional Planning staff time had to be reassigned to support the Project Manager on both projects. Fortunately, the unintended and indirect staffing impacts can be borne by the Planning Department because Santa Clara County Parks requested postponing the initiation of the Upper Stevens Creek Trail Planning Project due to their lack of staff capacity.

In January 2025, when the item returns for the Board to consider whether to pursue a partnership agreement for the Lower Barn, the General Manager will also seek Board concurrence with re-prioritizing the Hawthorns Historic Complex to include in the Big Rocks project list. This concurrence will enable the General Manager to continue redirecting additional Planning staff time from other lower priority projects to support the Project Manager so that neither the SFO Renovation project nor Historic Complex partnership are impacted.

FISCAL IMPACT

None - cost estimates associated with a partnership agreement will be brought to the board at a later date.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- March 23, 2022: Board reviewed and approved the Hawthorns Area vision and goals ([R-22-45, meeting minutes](#))
- September 13, 2023: Board formed an Ad Hoc Committee to explore ideas for the future use and management of the Historic Complex ([R-23-103, meeting minutes](#))
- April 10, 2024: FYI to the Board regarding a partnership opportunity for the Lower Barn ([April 10, 2024, meeting minutes](#))
- July 10, 2024: Board reviewed and commented on the Vision and Goals for the Hawthorns Historic Complex ([R-24-86, meeting minutes](#))
- July 10, 2024: Board reviewed and approved the Interim Stabilization and Debris Removal Plan for the Historic Complex ([R-24-87, meeting minutes](#))
- August 28, 2024: Board approved the Hawthorns Historic Complex Vision and Goals ([R-24-109, meeting minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The Board's discussions regarding the feasibility of the partnership work does not constitute a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act. If a partnership agreement for the Lower Barn were approved in the future, the District would conduct environmental review prior to implementation of improvements to the Lower Barn.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to work with the Ad Hoc Committee, guided by the Board-approved Historic Complex Vision Statement and Goals, on the proposed use, accelerated site feasibility analysis, and potential partnership opportunity for the Lower Barn. Staff will seek input from the Town of Portola Valley Planning Commission in November and return to the Board in a December 2024 study session with feedback from the Town, the final feasibility results, the proposed use of the Lower Barn, and partnership terms. Depending on Board input and direction, staff targets January 2025 for a Board decision on whether to pursue the Lower Barn partnership opportunity and, if so, to consider prioritizing the Project as a “Big Rock” in the District’s annual Capital Improvement and Action Plan.

On July 10, 2024, the Board approved an Interim Stabilization and Debris Removal Plan to mitigate structural degradation and provide additional stabilization for structures retaining historic integrity and to remove secondary structures that no longer retain historical integrity ([R-24-87](#)). The implementation of this plan is underway, and staff are currently working through the Town’s permitting process to secure permits for this work.

Attachment(s)

1. Hawthorns Area Planning Projects Map

Responsible Department Head:

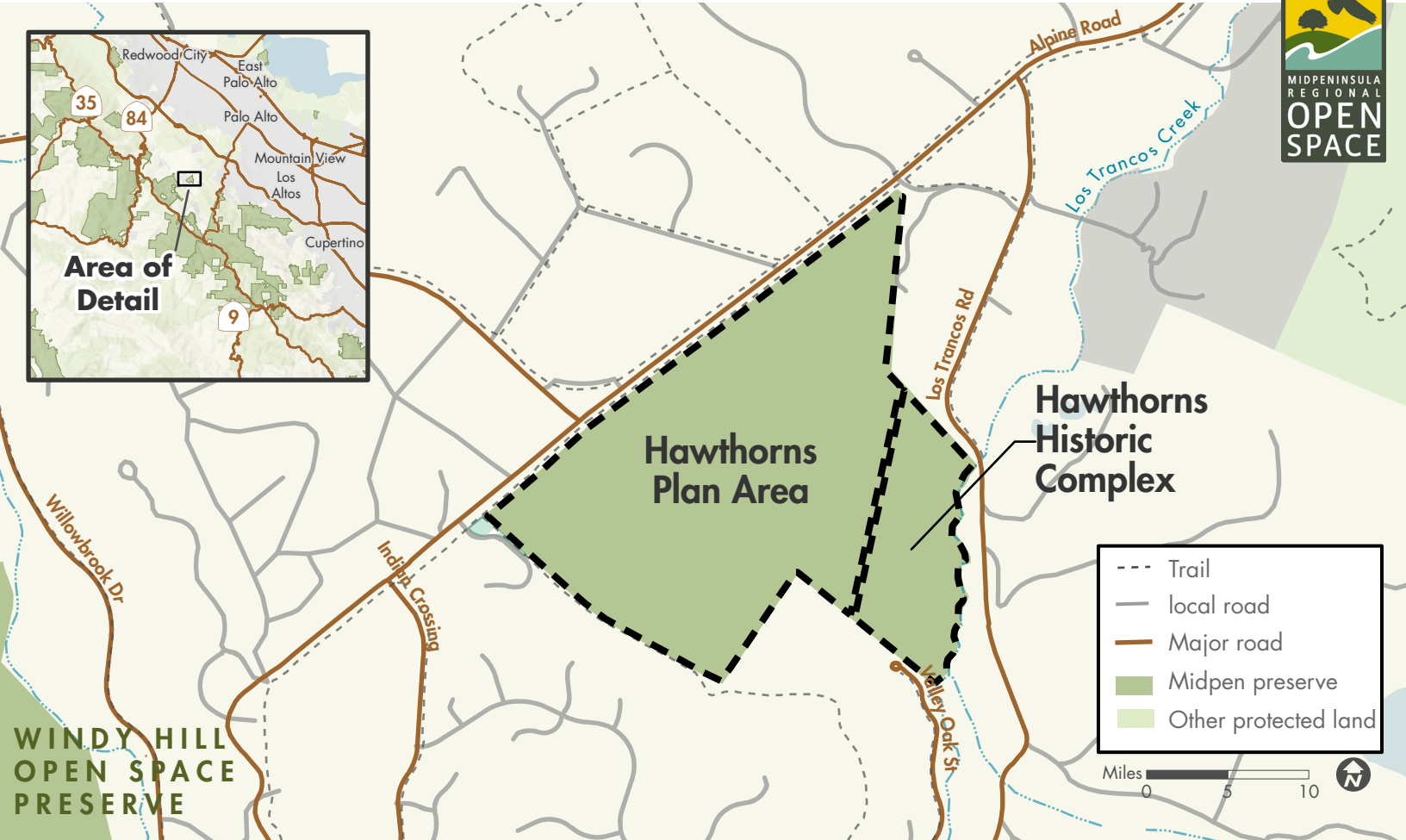
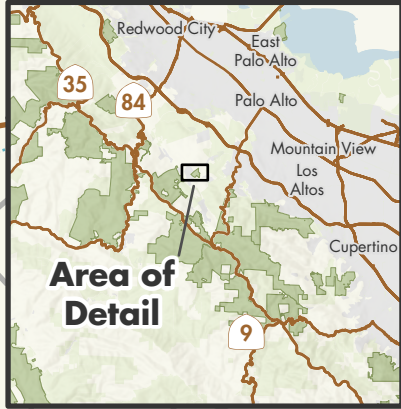
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---	Trail
—	local road
—	Major road
■	Midpen preserve
■	Other protected land



WINDY HILL
OPEN SPACE
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