



## PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-25-48  
April 15, 2025

**AGENDA ITEM 4**

### AGENDA ITEM

Incorporation of a Legacy Road as a Trail, Approval of a New Trail Extension, and Renaming of an Existing Trail at Thornewood Open Space Preserve

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *se*

Forward the following recommendations to the full Board of Directors for their review and consideration:

1. Add a 0.3-mile legacy road as part of the trail network at Thornewood Open Space Preserve, with access via a side use trail to a rock placed at the time of August Schilling's ownership inscribed with the phrase "memento mori", the former site of a "Redwood Temple" and former site of a "Redwood Pergola" and designate the trail for hiking and dog on leash use and a portion of the trail for equestrian use, with the proposed trail name of the Rock of Ages Trail.
2. Approve a conceptual alignment of a new trail extension to connect the vista point to the "rock of ages" via a trail extension designed to meet trail standards
3. Rename the Schilling Lake Trail to the Schilling Trail.

### SUMMARY

The General Manager recommends that the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) forward a recommendation to the full Board of Directors (Board) to incorporate a legacy road into the formal trail network at Thornewood Open Space Preserve, designate the trail for hiking and dogs on leash use, and designate a portion of the trail for equestrian use, consistent with the connecting trails, and name the trail the Rock of Ages Trail. The General Manager recommends limiting equestrian access to only the first part of the trail due to a clump of three fallen redwood trunks which are suspended above the trail and leave only 4 to 5 feet of clearance under the trees. The General Manager also recommends approval of a conceptual route as a future trail connection from the top of the trail to the memento mori rock. The General Manager further recommends renaming the Schilling Lake Trail the Schilling Trail to avoid visitor confusion since the lake no longer exists. The proposed trail use designation is consistent with Board Policy 4.07, *Trail Use Policies*. The proposed trail names are consistent with the naming criteria specified in Board Policy 5.01, *Site Naming, Gift, and Special Recognition*. Pending Board approval, the trail addition, designation, and name would be implemented through new trail signs and maps and the mileage added to the trail GIS database.

## HISTORY

Parts of Thornewood Open Space Preserve and adjoining parcels were once part of the Schilling family estate. August Schilling came to San Francisco in 1870 and worked for J. A. Folger. After starting in coffee, he made his fortune in spices and eventually had extensive land holdings in the Bay Area. By 1914, August Schilling (1854-1934) had purchased about 150 acres from Julian Thorne (the preserves namesake) and began developing his estate. The Schilling mansion, Portola Hall, was originally built by Edgar Preston and called Monte Bello, near Portola Road and Old La Honda Road on what is now private property and was demolished in 1952. Schilling also performed extensive landscaping work including vehicle access roads, pools, waterfalls, structures, and imitation rock concrete work. The remains of much of this work is still visible in Thornewood Open Space Preserve from the remains of the “Welcome Inn” and the “Welcome Inn Lake” next to the Bridle Trail and the “Lake in the Woods” which was a centerpiece of the rural part of the estate. The Lake in the Woods currently called Schilling Lake no longer exists, as it has filled in with sediment and is quickly turning into forest. On the property that the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) acquired in 1986, two unique features that were part of the Schilling estate are still visible, the foundation of the former Redwood Temple and the “Rock of Ages” inscribed with “memento mori”. Memento mori is a Latin term that translates to “remember you must die”. The term has been used for many purposes, but the focus is on remembering to live and make use of your life because you will inevitably die. In some religious contexts it is also a warning not to sin in preparation for judgement day.

## DISCUSSION

The former Schilling estate “automobile road” from the “Lake in the Woods” (Schilling Lake) to the site of a former redwood pergola is currently designated as a patrol road but is not a designated trail. It is posted with a “Not a Through Trail” sign. The trail is not a designated trail and is therefore not shown on preserve maps and does not have trail directional signs. The trail is open for public access and is currently used by hikers and dog walkers. Per Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) regulations, horses are not allowed since it is not a designated trail. The trail provides access to the base of the redwood temple and to the memento mori rock via a short spur trail created by visitor use. More frequent use of the site followed the placement of a geocache site on the rock. There is a landing at the top of the proposed trail that used to have a redwood pergola. While not as expansive as in Schilling’s time there is still a sliver of a view through the trees that have regrown since the estate was cleared of “undesirable” vegetation.

The General Manager recommends approving this as a designated trail, including the spur to the rock inscribed with memento mori, as a hiking and dog on leash trail. For consistency with the rest of the preserve use, equestrian use is proposed up to the spur to the memento mori rock. At this point District vehicle and horse traffic are blocked by a clump of three live fallen redwoods. While it is feasible to remove these trees, they are an interesting trail feature that is enjoyed by visitors. They are relatively easy to duck under, as there is 4 to 5 feet of clearance between the lowest tree and the trail. In the interest of retaining these trees the General Manager recommends only allowing hiking and dog on leash use above the trees. Due to the retention of these trees as a trail feature the trail will no longer be designated and maintained as a patrol road. The road is currently rarely used as a patrol or maintenance route. (Attachment 1)

The General Manager also recommends approving a conceptual route as a future trail connection from the top of the trail to the memento mori rock. While the existing use trail provides access to the rock it does not meet District trail standards, so it is desirable to construct a new trail segment in the future. This segment is relatively short, only 100 to 200 feet and would be constructed through a disturbed area almost entirely covered by invasive St John's wort which was likely planted in the Schilling era. (Attachment 1)

Staff were solicited for trail name suggestions and then staff selected preferred names for consideration of the PNR. Per Board Policy 5.01 for [Site Naming, Gift, and Special Recognition](#), Preserve trails shall ordinarily be named after: a) geographical, botanical, or zoological identification, or b) historical persons, uses, or events associated with the site. All of the proposed trail names fall under the historic persons, uses, or events category. The "Rock of Ages Trail" is the suggested name for the proposed trail between Schilling Lake and the site of the former redwood pergola vista point. An alternate name is the "Memento Mori Trail". Both names are in regard to the polished rock inscribed with "memento mori" placed by August Schilling as part of the estate. Per his self-published photo book *Portola Hall-Hills*, the rock was originally located at the Arden Hills and placed at its current location. It is likely that Arden Hills refers to the Coyote Hills which are adjacent to the Arden salt ponds owned and operated by Schilling. That book describes the inscribed rock as the "Rock of Ages." Mortar holes are present on the rock which suggest that the rock was a grinding rock used by native people in its original location.

Over time, Schilling Lake has filled in with sediment and is no longer recognizable as a lake. Most of the time there is no visible standing water. Water still flows through the site to a spillway that is functional but is scheduled for repair. The Board reviewed management options for Schilling Lake and selected a passive succession of the lake into a meadow and a forest ([R10-58](#)). Now that the lake no longer exists, the current trail name, the "Schilling Lake Trail" leads visitors to expect a woodland lake at the end of the trail. Therefore, a trail name change is proposed as a truth in advertising measure. The proposed name to replace the Schilling Lake Trail is simply the Schilling Trail (Attachment 1), which still recognizes August Schilling's role in developing and preserving the estate. An alternate name is the Schilling Spice Trail which retains the Schilling name but also recognizes what he was most famous for, the Schilling Spice Company. Signing will remain at the former lake indicating its historic name and explaining the process of succession.

## FISCAL IMPACT

There is sufficient funding in the FY25 budget to cover the costs of the recommended actions.

## PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- **October 22, 1986:** Board approved the purchase and addition of the Zand II property to the Thornewood Open Space Preserve and adopted an interim use and management plan. ([R-86-93](#), [meeting minutes](#)).
- **April 28, 2010:** Board adopted a minor intervention long-term management approach to Schilling Lake ([R10-58](#), [minutes](#))
- **June 22, 2022:** FYI update on the natural ecological succession of Schilling Lake ([FYI](#))

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. A meeting will be held with the Grandview Espinosa community following the PNR meeting and prior to a full board meeting

## **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

The designation of the existing patrol road as a publicly accessible trail is Categorical Exempt in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Existing Facilities. The existing patrol road is an existing facility and the proposed use as a trail would result in a less intensive use than as patrol access road. The designation of the existing use trail to the memento mori rock is Categorical Exempt in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Existing Facilities. The conceptual alignment to extend the current trail 100 to 200 feet is consistent with the Initial Study / Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Open Space Maintenance and Restoration Program (OSMRP) (SCH #2021080129), adopted by the Board on September 22, 2021 (Resolution No. 21-32) The selection of a trail names is not a Project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

## **NEXT STEPS**

Following Committee consideration, the General Manager will forward the recommended trail designations and trail names to the full Board of Directors for consideration and approval.

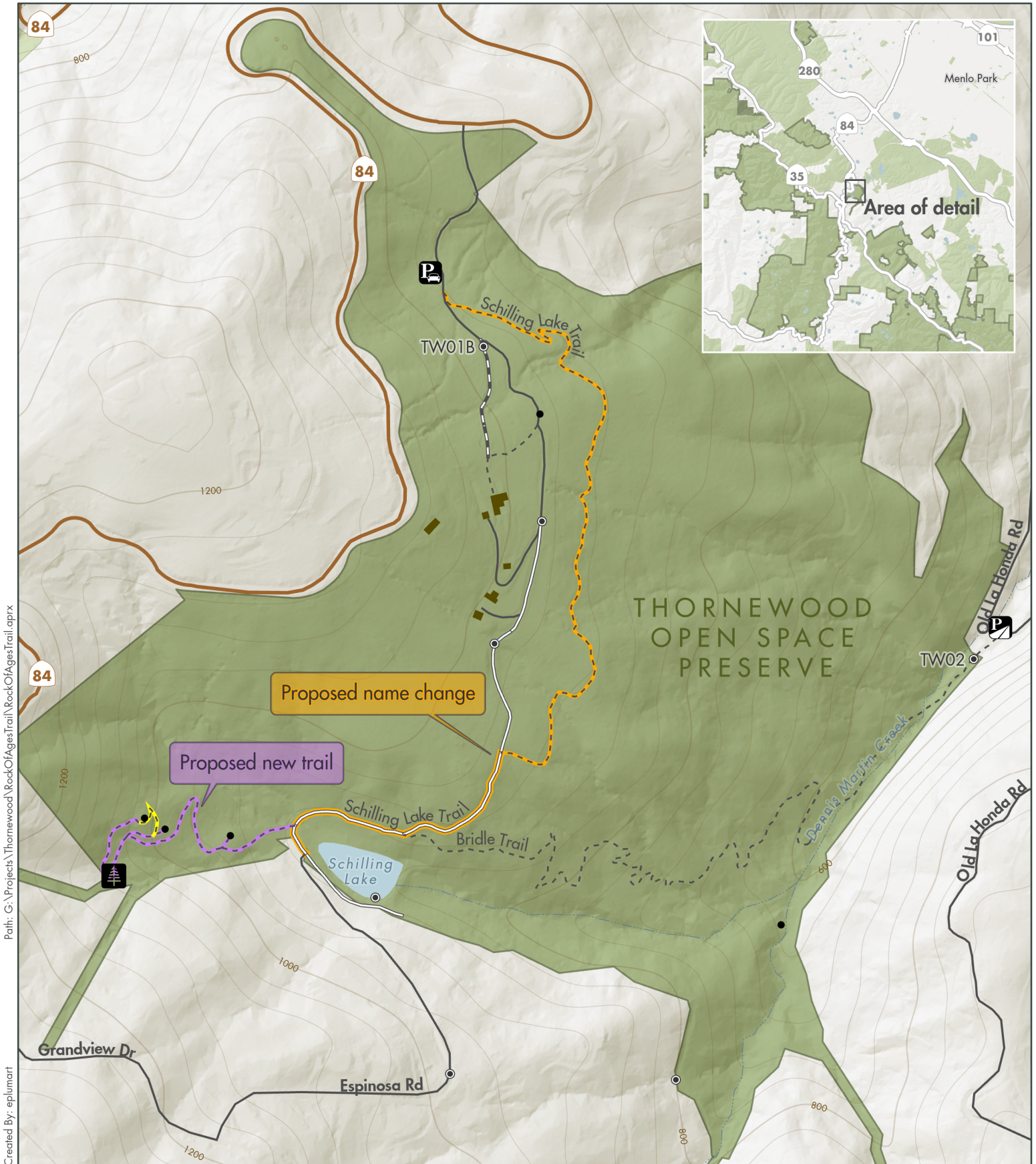
### **Attachments**

1. Trail Map

Responsible Department Head:  
Ana Ruiz, General Manager

Prepared by/Contact person:  
Brian Malone, Assistant General Manager

Graphics prepared by:  
Elizabeth Plumart, GIS Intern, IST Department



Path: G:\Projects\Thornewood\RockOfAges\Trail\RockOfAges\Trail.aprx  
Created By: eplumart

### Thornewood Trail Designation

- Midpen preserve
- Other protected land
- Unpaved seasonal road
- Proposed new trail
- Conceptual connector
- Proposed trail name change

Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District  
(Midpen)  
4/7/2025



While the District strives to use the best available digital data, these data do not represent a legal survey and are merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.



### Thornewood Trail Designation

- Midpen preserve
- Unpaved seasonal road
- Trail
- Proposed new trail
- Conceptual connector
- Point of interest
- 🌲 Notable flora



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District  
(Midpen)  
4/7/2025



Feet  
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