



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-24-109  
Meeting 24-23  
August 28, 2024

## AGENDA ITEM 7

### AGENDA ITEM

Hawthorns Historic Complex – Vision and Goals

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review and approve the Vision and Goals for the Hawthorns Historic Complex as recommended by the Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee.
2. Extend the Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee work to complete and present the findings to the Board of the high-level feasibility analysis for re-use of the Lower Barn, anticipated for January 2025.

### 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. At this August 28, 2024 Board meeting, the Board will review and approve the Historic Complex Vision and Goals as recommended by the Hawthorns Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee (Ad Hoc Committee) and previously reviewed by the Board during a study session on July 10, 2024 ([R-24-86](#)).

### 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 and includes several structures that date back to the late 1800s.

The planning process for the Historic Complex is a separate but parallel process to the Hawthorns Area Plan project, which is currently underway with a focus on the use and management of the overall Hawthorns Area. The Hawthorns Area Plan will provide overarching guidance on resource and land management actions at the Hawthorns Area while the Historic Complex project focuses specifically on future use and management of the Historic Complex area consistent with the goals of the Area Plan.

## **Hawthorns Area Plan**

In 2021, the District initiated the multi-year Hawthorns Area Plan process to develop the property 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, this multistep planning process will result in the Hawthorns Area Plan, a comprehensive use and management plan guiding resource and land management actions at the site. The Hawthorns Area Plan, which is currently in the Programming/Conceptual Planning phase, began with the development of vision and goals for the entire property, approved by the Board on March 23, 2022 ([R-22-45](#)). The Vision Statement and Goals established in 2022 set the overarching direction for the future use and management of the property and are included below.

### *Board-approved Hawthorns Area Vision Statement*

The Hawthorns Area offers picturesque views of rolling oak grasslands and the Santa Cruz Mountains, provides important wildlife refuge, and reflects the region's natural, agricultural, and social history. The District will protect and manage natural, scenic, cultural, and open space resources at the Hawthorns Area and provide ecologically sensitive public access consistent with the District's mission and the allowable uses outlined in the property's conservation easement.

### *Board-approved Hawthorns Area Goals*

- Protect and restore native habitat and manage for ecological resiliency of aquatic and terrestrial habitat, wildlife connectivity, and other natural resources.
- Open the Hawthorns Area to low-intensity public access, provide an internal trail system, and provide multi-modal access to the property.
- Connect to adjacent public trails and explore opportunities for trail connections to regional open space lands.
- Interpret the rich natural, cultural, and historic features and pursue partnerships to manage the property's natural and cultural history.
- Highlight scenic viewpoints and design recreational amenities while protecting scenic viewsheds.
- Manage the property for safe public access in a fiscally sustainable manner that promotes ongoing public support and appreciation with ongoing public engagement and consistent with the District's Good Neighbor Policy.

## **Historic Complex Planning**

While the Hawthorns Area Plan will provide overarching guidance on resource 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 has recently started. 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, but specifically guide the future use and management of the Historic Complex. This approach mirrors the process that guided the Alma Cultural Landscape Rehabilitation Plan, which has a separate vision statement and goals under the umbrella of the overall vision and goals for Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve.

*Proposed 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.

*Proposed Historic Complex Goals*

Staff presented the Draft Vision and Goals at the July 10, 2024 Board study session. The Board provided feedback to mention landscape features that are part of the history of the property into the proposed goals. In response to this feedback, Goal #2 was expanded to include management of the landscape features in the Historic Complex.

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 <sup>1</sup>Conservation 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.

District staff received two written comments related to the Historic Complex material presented on July 10, 2024. These are summarized in the table below:

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Response</b>
Concerns regarding a trail connection from the Historic Complex to Valley Oak.	The concept for this trail connection was recommended by the Hawthorns Area Plan Public Access Working Group (PAWG) to support the Town’s Trails and Paths Committee’s vision for regional trail connections through the Hawthorns property. The Board-approved scope for the Historic Complex planning process does not include regional trail connections – regional trail connections are instead a subject of the Hawthorns Area Plan and PAWG process. The District’s Planning and Natural Resources Committee will have an opportunity to review and consider PAWG recommendations that pertain to regional trail

<sup>1</sup> The Hawthorns Property is overlain by a Conservation Easement held by Peninsula Open Space Trust that establishes use restrictions for the property. Neither the Federal guidelines for the treatment of historic properties nor the Conservation Easement prohibit the removal, repair, or replacement of existing buildings or structures on the property.

	connections in September. For regional trail connections that extends beyond the Hawthorns Area and into Town Trails, the District would look to the Town to either lead or co-lead the planning and implementation efforts.
Recommends use of the buildings or building footprints for multiple housing units and an interpretive center.	These recommendations are consistent with the draft vision and goals. Specific uses will be determined during the planning process for the Historic Complex and the District will seek further public input as the project advances.

In September 2023, the Board approved creation of an Ad Hoc Committee to review and guide the District’s development of preliminary use and management ideas for the entire Historic Complex area. As a reminder, Ad Hoc Committees normally function for up to one year to complete their specific charge. In the last eight months, a partnership opportunity related specifically to the Lower Barn emerged, redirecting the project team and Ad Hoc Committee’s attention on this particular structure, delaying the Ad Hoc Committee’s work to explore the use and management of the entire Historic Complex site and all other existing structures.

In response, the project team and Ad Hoc Committee have been exploring the feasibility of the partnership opportunity to re-use the Lower Barn as community programming space for both the general public and for adults with intellectual or developmental delays living in residential facilities near the Hawthorns Area ([April 10, 2024 FYI](#)). To this end, staff are currently carrying out a high-level feasibility analysis for this potential partnership opportunity to confirm the permitting process and constructability of repairs and improvements to the Lower Barn. The results of an accelerated site feasibility analysis and draft terms for a partnership agreement specifically for use of the Lower Barn are scheduled to be presented at a Board study session in late 2024. Depending on Board input and direction at the study session, staff would target January 2025 to return for a Board decision on whether to continue pursuing the Lower Barn partnership opportunity and adding this effort as a new Key Project on the District’s annual Action Plan.

Since the current Ad Hoc Committee’s timeframe is reaching its normal sunset timeframe, the General Manager recommends extending the current Ad Hoc Committee’s tenure through January to complete their current work to prepare for Board discussion on the Lower Barn partnership opportunity.

With the current Ad Hoc Committee sunsetting soon, in January, the General Manager will be asking the Board to consider forming a new Ad Hoc Committee to explore preliminary use and management ideas for the *remaining* buildings and site. A new Ad Hoc Committee would work for approximately one year or less and forward their final preliminary use and management ideas for the remaining buildings to the Board or a standing committee at the conclusion of their work.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

None.

**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 ([R-23-103, meeting minutes](#))
- April 10, 2024: FYI to the Board regarding 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](#))

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

## **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will continue to work with the Ad Hoc Committee, guided by the Historic Complex Vision Statement and Goals, on the proposed use, accelerated site feasibility analysis and potential partnership opportunity for the Lower Barn. Staff will present and seek Board input on the feasibility results, the proposed use of the Lower Barn and partnership opportunity at a study session in late 2024.

On July 10, 2024, the Board approved an Interim Stabilization and Debris Removal Plan to mitigate structural degradation 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.

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