



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-25-33  
Meeting 25-08  
March 12, 2025

## AGENDA ITEM 8

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Approval of the Hawthorns Area Plan Public Access Working Group Recommendations with Slight Modifications

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider and approve the Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group's (PAWG's) recommendations with slight modifications supported by the Board of Directors (Board) at the February 26, 2025 Special Meeting and direct the General Manager to incorporate them into the public access component of the Hawthorns Area Plan. The complete Hawthorns Area Plan will be developed in the next phase of work and brought back to the Board for consideration prior to initiation of environmental review.
2. Determine that the Hawthorns Area PAWG has fulfilled its charge and direct the General Manager to dissolve the group and keep members on the project notification list to solicit their individual input as part of future Committee and Board meetings on the project.

### SUMMARY

In 2023, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Board of Directors (Board) formed the Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group (PAWG) to help the District develop public access recommendations for the Hawthorns area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve. District staff presented the PAWG's recommendations to the Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee for consideration on September 17, 2024 (R-24-115). The recommendations include two conceptual parking area location options and a loop trail concept with future (time uncertain) trail connections to the Town of Portola Valley's (Town's) trails. The recommendations also include bicycle, equestrian, dog-on-leash, and hiking access designations for each trail segment. On February 26, 2025 (R-25-23), staff presented to the full Board the final PAWG recommendations, input from recent community engagement, and an alternative for Trail Segments #16 and #17 that aligns with both recent input and the PAWG's intent. The Board asked clarification questions on trails and parking options and received additional public comments. They expressed appreciation for the PAWG's dedication and the well-executed process by staff. Overall, the Board was encouraged by the direction the project is going and expressed support for the alternative trail alignment as a replacement for segments #16 and #17 and a desire to remove one of three bench locations (Bench B) from the plan. The Board will be considering at this meeting the PAWG's public access recommendations with these slight modifications to incorporate into the Hawthorns Area Plan.

## DISCUSSION

The Hawthorns Area Plan project is a multiyear planning effort to open the 79-acre Hawthorns Area property to the public. The property is located in the Town of Portola Valley, is part of Windy Hill Preserve, and is subject to a conservation easement, which allows low intensity, ecologically sensitive recreation and defines limits on potential future development of the property. With Phases 1 (Vision and Goals) and 2 (Existing Conditions/Opportunities and Constraints) complete, the project is currently in Phase 3 (Programming/Conceptual Planning), which is focused on public access options. Pending Board approval of the PAWG recommendations, the project would move into Phase 4 (Area Plan/Environmental Review). Board approval of the project at the end of environmental review would be required before the project moves into design development, permitting, bidding and construction as part of Phase 5 (Implementation).

The Board approved formation of a Public Access Working Group as part of Phase 3 to assist the District with public access options. Over the course of a year through seven meetings and site visits and working within the Board-approved vision and goals of the project, the PAWG developed their recommendations for public access.

### Feedback from February 26, 2025 Board Study Session

Staff presented the PAWG recommendations to the Board (R-25-23). The Board reviewed the recommendations and considered public input. Below is a summary of key Board feedback.

- Trail Segments #16 and #17: The Board asked about the criteria and timeline for assessing whether to consider trail segments #16 and #17 in the future. Staff explained that the decision would be based on parking and trail usage levels, which would be evaluated 3 to 5 years after the opening of the Hawthorns Property. Additionally, the connection to Sweet Springs Trail would also require coordination with Portola Valley Ranch and the Town and possibly certain permissions and agreements between the parties.
- Alternative Trail to Trail Segments #16 and #17: The Board asked whether the alternative trail to segments #16 and #17 could be built concurrently with the main loop trail. Staff confirmed that it could, while noting that the potential connection to Sweet Springs Trail would be evaluated after the Hawthorns Property opens and pending additional coordination with Portola Valley Ranch and the Town.
- Alpine Road Trail: The Board requested details on the proposed enhancements for the Alpine Road Trail. Staff clarified that the District's trail crew recommends leaving the trail in its current location, widening the trail and installing a split rail fence. Improvements to this trail would also require additional discussions with the Town.
- Benches: There was a Board preference expressed for reducing the number of benches in accordance with the District's standard practice.
- Opportunities for Regional Trail Connections: The Board sought clarification on the PAWG's support for a regional trail connection through the Historic Complex. Staff clarified that the identified connection reflects the PAWG's interest and support of a regional trail connection that is shown in the Town's General Plan Trail Element but does not represent a finalized trail alignment.

- Traffic and Pedestrian Safety at Portola Road and Alpine Road Intersection:
  - The Board asked whether adding traffic signals at this intersection would improve safety. Staff explained that the Town has jurisdiction over roadway and intersection modifications and the Town generally aims to minimize traffic lights and signs to preserve the town's rural character.
  - The Board asked which parking option would be a safer option. The project's traffic engineer responded that option 10 is safer because it utilized a controlled intersection where all cars are required to stop. In contrast, the driveway for option 9 is located mid-block where cars are not required to stop.
  - The Board asked whether pedestrian safety on Alpine Road Trail was evaluated while selecting a parking option. Staff noted that feedback received from the Chair of the Portola Valley Trail and Path Committee indicated that parking option 10 is preferred because potential improvements to the intersection and this section of Alpine Road Trail would enhance safety on the trail.
- Equestrian Parking: The Board expressed interest in providing equestrian parking at Hawthorns. Staff responded that the PAWG evaluated equestrian parking and determined that, due to limited space, projected peak demand (ranges from 25 – 70 spaces) and the goal to minimize offsite parking impacts in the surrounding neighborhood, the PAWG did not recommend the inclusion of equestrian parking spaces. If equestrian trailers are to be parked within the parking area, each takes up 5 car parking spaces. They discussed that the closest equestrian parking area is about 2 miles away at Portola Valley Town Center.
- Retaining Wall: There was a desire to eliminate the proposed retaining wall for the parking area that were shown in the conceptual drawings to address the grade changes along Alpine Road. The landscape architect indicated that the grading of the parking area will be examined in the next phase of design, which will require additional topographic survey work.
- Phased Approach for Parking: The Board asked about the timeline for implementing parking in phases. Staff indicated that the phased approach would follow the same 3 to 5-year timeframe after the property opens to the public, allowing time for usage levels to normalize and be monitored.
- Alignment with Conservation Easement: The Board sought clarification on how parking option 10 aligns with the conservation easement. Staff explained the overall intent of the conservation easement is to protect the conservation values of the property while allowing the District to provide ecologically-sensitive public access. The easement's language allows for public access improvements to occur along the perimeter of the Improved Area but does not state that they must occur only within the Improved Area. Option 10 is located along the perimeter of the Improved Area. The District is working closely with POST, who holds the conservation easement, to ensure that all plans for the property align with the terms and purposes of the conservation easement.

In addition to Board clarification questions, the Board received verbal comments in addition to the written comments provided prior to the meeting. This public feedback reflects a range of perspectives on public access, safety, visual, natural resources and phasing considerations. Below is a summary of key public feedback.

- Driveway Access and Parking: Several commenters emphasized the necessity of parking for those who do not live in Portola Valley, as driving is the only way for many visitors to access the Preserve. Some supported parking option 10, while others expressed concerns about the size of the parking area, safety of the driveway location and potential impact on pedestrians, particularly for schoolchildren.
- Trail Segment #17 and Alternative to trail segments #16 and #17: There was broad support for improving regional trail connections. There was also support for the new alternative trail alignment. However, concerns were raised about fire risks, wildlife impacts connecting to Sweet Springs Trail, specifically on trail segment #17.
- Alpine Road Trail: Some urged collaboration with the Town to improve Alpine Road Trail for its safe route to school and as a key link to Windy Hill preserve. Some felt the District should be responsible for the upgrades and improvements to Alpine Road Trail.
- Phased Approach for Parking: While some saw phasing as an effective strategy, others felt it could create logistical challenges and delay needed improvements for the opening of the Preserve.
- Preserve Character and Town Impacts: Several speakers stressed the importance of maintaining the rural character of Town while balancing public access. Some expressed concerns about increased pressure on the Town due to expanded trail access and emphasized the importance of cost consciousness to the Town.
- Concurrent Projects in the Hawthorns Property: Some commenters urged a more unified approach, viewing the Historic Complex and the Area Plan as one project rather than separate efforts and requested the District evaluate both projects' impacts together rather than separately.
- Public Process and Timing: A few speakers expressed concerns that the public had limited time to review the alternative trail, noting that some only became aware of this change within the past two days when the board meeting agenda was posted.
- Fire Safety and Environmental Considerations: – Fire risks were brought up as a significant concern, particularly regarding any additional public use resulting from a connection to Sweet Springs Trail. Additionally, speakers requested careful evaluation of potential impacts on protected wildlife species, including the white-tailed kite and other bird species.

### **Public Access Recommendations**

At the March 12 Board Meeting, the Board will consider approving the public access recommendations detailed below for incorporation into the overall Hawthorns Area Plan. These reflect the PAWG's recommendations with slight modifications based on Board input received at the earlier February 26, 2025 Special Meeting. The Hawthorns Area Plan will be developed in Phase 4 and include land and resource management actions, which were not part of the PAWG's work but are part of the District's use and management planning process. Refer to **Attachment 1** for public access recommendations including trail segments and conceptual parking options.

#### 1. Internal Trail System

- Establish an internal loop trail alignment and spur trails to viewpoints.

- Locate two benches at two viewpoints: Bench A facing northeast and Bench C facing northwest.
2. Trail Connections with Surrounding Town Trails and Pathways
    - Connect the internal trail system to Alpine Trail.
    - Select trail segment #18, which was presented at the February 26 Board Study Session, in lieu of trail segments #16 and 17.
    - Evaluate a future connection from trail segment #18 to Sweet Springs Trail after monitoring trail usage following the preserve's opening (connection would require coordination between the Town and Portola Valley Ranch and possibly certain permissions and agreements between the parties).
  3. Opportunities for Regional Trail Connections Beyond Town Trails
    - Indicate support for future regional trail connection to Los Trancos Trail as noted in the Town's General Plan Trail Element.
  4. Proposed Trail Uses
    - Establish hiking, dogs-on-leash, equestrian, and bicycle uses on the internal loop trail, spur trails and connections to Alpine Trail (bicycle use on Alpine Trail requires Town approval).
    - Establish hiking use only on trail segment #18.
    - Establish hiking use only on future connections to Sweet Springs Trail, if any of the connections are built.
  5. Conceptual Parking Designs
    - Study both conceptual parking options 9 and 10 (parking option 9 utilizes existing driveway to staff residence, and parking option 10 utilizes new driveway at intersection of Portola Road and Alpine Road). Staff will conduct additional surveys and technical studies and advance both designs to the schematic phase before one is finally selected by the Board at a future date.
    - Provide standard parking spaces only (no equestrian spaces at this time).
    - Study the feasibility of a phased approach starting with 20-25 spaces and setting a maximum of 50 parking spaces if demand requires consideration of additional parking.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The recommended action has no immediate fiscal impact. Implementation schedules and cost estimates for planning, design and construction will be developed at later date once the Board reviews and approves the elements of the public access plan for the Hawthorns Area. This information will then be used to inform the development of future annual Budgets and Action Plans.

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #06 *Windy Hill: Trail Improvements, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership* allocation, costs-to-date, projected future project expenditures and projected ending balance at the portfolio level.

<b>MAA06 Windy Hill—Trail Improvements, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership Portfolio Allocation:</b>	<b>\$12,740,000</b>
Life-to-Date Spent (as of 2/3/25):	(\$451,150)

Encumbrances:	(\$31,963)
Remaining FY25 Project Budgets:	(\$163,519)
Future MAA06 project costs (projected through FY28):	(\$309,113)
<b>Total Portfolio Expenditures:</b>	<b>(\$955,745)</b>
<b>Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):</b>	<b>\$11,784,255</b>

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #06 *Windy Hill: Trail Improvements, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership* allocation, costs-to-date, projected life-to-date project expenditures and projected portfolio balance remaining.

<b>MAA06 Windy Hill—Trail Improvements, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership Portfolio Allocation:</b>	<b>\$12,740,000</b>
Projected Project Expenditures (life of project):	
06-002 Hawthorns Area Plan	(\$955,745)
<b>Total Portfolio Expenditures:</b>	<b>(\$955,745)</b>
<b>Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):</b>	<b>\$11,784,255</b>

## BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- **May 18, 2021:** Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) received an informational presentation on the proposed planning and public engagement process for the Hawthorns Area Plan and provided input and guidance. ([R-21-65](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **August 24, 2021:** PNR reviewed the proposed draft vision and goals and provided input and guidance. ([R-21-112](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **November 16, 2021:** PNR reviewed the revised vision and goals and draft public access working group strategy and provided further refinements. PNR unanimously recommended forwarding the refined vision and goal statements to the full Board for consideration. ([R-21-156](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **March 1, 2022:** PNR reviewed the proposed planning and public engagement process to develop the Hawthorns Area Plan. ([R-22-29](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **March 23, 2022:** Board reviewed and approved the Vision and Goals for the Hawthorns Area Plan. ([R-22-45](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **July 13, 2022:** Board approved the award of contract with Parisi Transportation Consulting to provide transportation planning services for the Hawthorns Area Plan ([R-22-81](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **March 21, 2023:** PNR reviewed the Existing Conditions/Opportunities and Constraints Report, Existing Transportation Conditions Technical Memo, Public Access Framework, and the Public Access Working Group composition and formation strategy. ([R-23-35](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **April 26, 2023:** Board reviewed and approved the Existing Conditions/Opportunities and Constraints Report, Existing Transportation Conditions Technical Memo, Public Access Framework, and the Public Access Working Group composition as well as recruitment and formation strategy. ([R-23-44](#), [meeting minutes](#))

- **June 21, 2023:** Board interviewed ten candidates by the Hawthorns Area Ad Hoc Committee and select six individuals to fill the Interest Area Representative seats on the Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group. ([R-23-69, no meeting minute taken for the interviews](#))
- **June 28, 2023:** Board Appointed members to serve on the Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group. ([R-23-75, meeting minutes](#))
- **August 9, 2023:** Board approved the award of contract with CSW|ST2 to provide preliminary site plan and conceptual design services for the Hawthorns Area Plan. ([R-23-78, meeting minutes](#))
- **February 14, 2024:** Board approved the amendment of contracts with Parametrix (transportation consultant, formerly Parisi Transportation Consulting) and PGAdesign (PAWG facilitator). ([R-24-17, meeting minutes](#))
- **September 17, 2024:** PNR reviewed the PAWG recommendations, made no modifications, and supported the next step of presenting the recommendations to the Town before returning to a Study Session of the Board. ([R-24-115, meeting minutes](#))
- **February 26, 2025:** At this Study Session, Board reviewed the PAWG recommendations and public feedback and directed staff to return to a regular meeting of the Board for consideration and approval of the recommendations with any modifications requested by the Board. ([R-25-23](#)).

**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. Environmental review for the Hawthorns Area Plan is anticipated to occur in a future fiscal year, pending Board approval of the public access elements to include as part of the CEQA Project Description. Environmental review would begin once the project description is further defined and approved by the Board.

**NEXT STEPS**

Pending Board approval of the public access recommendations with any modifications requested by the Board, staff will compile the information obtained in the project’s prior phases of work, prepare the Hawthorns Area Plan, and develop a project description for Board consideration to use in the future environmental review phase per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Board would consider CEQA findings prior to approving the project for implementation.

**Tentative Project Timelines**

Calendar Year	Hawthorns Area Plan Phase
March 2025	Completion of Phase 3: Return to the Board to consider accepting the PAWG recommendations, with slight modifications, and directing the General Manager to incorporate them into the public access component of the Hawthorns Area Plan.

2025-2027	Phase 4: Compile all elements of the Hawthorns Area Plan, including the public access components. Conduct CEQA environmental review and obtain Board approval of the project.
2027-TBD	Phase 5: Implementation (design development, permitting, bidding and construction)

Attachments

1. Hawthorns Area Public Access Recommendations Map

Responsible Department Head:

Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Department

Prepared by:

Ashley Mac, Planner III, Planning Department

Tina Hugg, Senior Planner, Planning Department

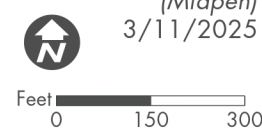

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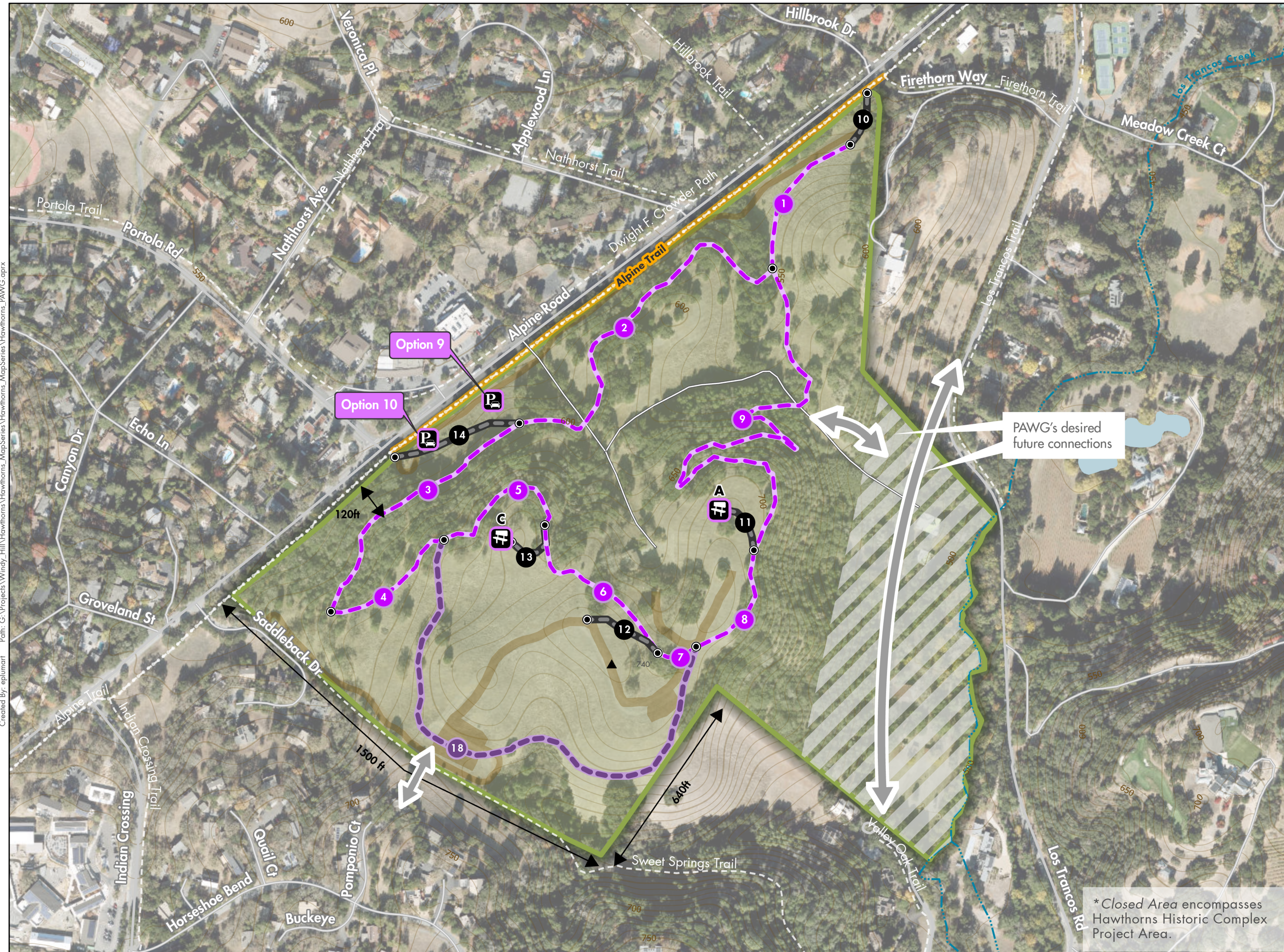


Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District  
(Midpen)  
3/11/2025


**Hawthorns Area  
Conceptual Trail Design**

-  Hawthorns area property line
-  Closed area\*
-  Town trail
-  Fire road
-  Conceptual loop trail
-  Option 1
-  Trail #18
-  Alpine Rd trail improvement corridor
-  Fuel break
-  PAWG desired future connections
-  Trail junction
-  Proposed bench
-  Proposed parking lot



\*Closed Area encompasses Hawthorns Historic Complex Project Area.

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.

Created By: eplumar Path: C:\Projects\Windy Hill\Hawthorns\MapSeries\Hawthorns\_MapSeries\Hawthorns\_PAWG.aprx