



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-25-17
Meeting 25-03
January 22, 2025

AGENDA ITEM 9

AGENDA ITEM

Hawthorns Historic Complex – Lower Barn Partnership Opportunity

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Direct the General Manager to pursue a partnership for rehabilitating and programming the Hawthorns Historic Complex Lower Barn and bring the proposed terms and conditions of a partnership agreement to the Board of Directors at a later meeting for consideration of approval.

SUMMARY

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 high-level development of preliminary use and management ideas for the Historic Complex. In response to an unanticipated and valuable partnership opportunity related specifically to the Lower Barn, the Ad Hoc Committee shifted their attention in early 2024 to explore its rehabilitation and re-use as programming space that would serve people with disabilities and be made available to the broader public. On January 22, 2025, the Board will review the feasibility work conducted to date on the Lower Barn and decide whether to pursue the Lower Barn partnership opportunity.

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 District is preparing a new Hawthorns Area Plan for the larger property, and recently initiated a planning process for the Historic Complex, both of which are further explained below on page 2.

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 high-level 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](#)), and 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 Vision Statement for the Historic Complex

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 Goals for 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 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.

Historic Complex Partnership Opportunity

As the Board Ad Hoc Committee had been exploring future use and management ideas for the Historic Complex, the Committee met with a potential partner in Portola Valley, Jim and Patty

White, regarding potential reuse of the Lower Barn. The District was first introduced to Jim and Patty White in 2017 as interested and viable partners for the larger 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 structure to meet their residential facility goals and timeline, the Whites shifted their residential project (known as Willow Commons) to an adjacent private property located at 4388 Alpine Road across the 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 have been exploring programming space options for current and future residents in Willow Commons and other local and regional residential facilities for adults with developmental disabilities or delays. Partnering with the District on the potential rehabilitation and re-use of the Lower Barn as a programmed community space is one option under consideration by the Whites. The Lower Barn is a large 4,500 square feet, one-story structure with gabled roof and vertical board-and-batten siding. Programming would entail use of the barn as a community studio space for creative art projects inspired by the natural surroundings that services their residents and includes access to the space and programs for the larger public. For the Whites to arrive at decision points for their planning efforts as part of the next phase of their Willow Commons development, they seek a partnership commitment from the District. Assuming a partnership is approved, the Whites are prepared to contribute significant private funding for the rehabilitation and reuse of the barn, and enter into a long-term mutual commitment agreement to sustain the ongoing operation of community programming in a manner that will provide a public benefit.

Results of a High-level Feasibility Analysis for Reuse of the Lower Barn

To inform the viability of rehabilitation and reuse of the Lower Barn, a focused, high-level feasibility analysis for this specific structure was completed in 2024. The feasibility analysis confirmed the permitting approach and constructability of repairs and improvements to the Lower Barn. The focus of the analysis and results are summarized below.

Architectural, Geotechnical, and Structural Feasibility

Preservation and rehabilitation of the Lower Barn is feasible from a historic and structural standpoint. Building a new foundation for the Lower Barn is feasible from a soils and geology standpoint with a proposed design that is not anticipated to be prohibitively expensive.

Parking and Access

The 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 private shuttle.

Parking for individual cars would be primarily limited to staff members and instructors. The small parking area would also provide accessible ADA permit parking for members of the public when programs are made available to the public.

Program Development

The Lower Barn would serve as a location for adults with disabilities to acquire and develop independence, vocational, and socialization skills while connecting with nature. Potential creative offerings include weaving, pressed flower artwork, sun printing, and botanical block printing. More specific programming plans would be finalized after research and discussions of existing day programs.

The Lower Barn's location across Alpine Road from Willow Commons and within a mile from two transitional living group homes enable a local residential population of adults with intellectual and developmental delays to participate in the programs offered. Programs would also be open to residents of other facilities in the region for adults with disabilities. A privately-funded shuttle service would be the main source of transportation for day program participants. Day programs could be offered seven days a week, and participants might use the site on a full or partial day. A limited number of program participation registrations would also be available to the general public. Opportunities to partner with additional complementary organizations could also be considered during day program development.

In addition, the District anticipates using the Lower Barn facility on a limited basis for uses such as staff meetings and volunteer trainings. Rehabilitation of the Lower Barn would be an important step towards restoring and interpreting the structures within the Historic Complex for the broader public.

Permitting and Approval Process with the Town of Portola Valley

Upon initial review of the Town of Portola Valley's regulations and subsequent discussions with Town staff, this proposed rehabilitation of the Lower Barn and day use programs would be eligible for and require a Conditional Use Permit. If the Board agrees to the partnership and the project is developed further, permit approvals would be sought from the Town of Portola Valley. Public outreach, including to the Town residents, would occur at that stage.

Partnership Agreement Terms

The District and the Whites have initiated discussions regarding the terms of a partnership agreement that would be refined as the scope of the project is more fully developed. The General Manager would present proposed terms and conditions of a partnership agreement to the Board at a future date. Proposed programming use and associated infrastructure are being designed to be compatible with the Conservation Easement, and the District would continue to consult with POST as conceptual plans become more refined. Also, per the Board-approved goals, the partnership agreement and requirements regarding structure rehabilitation and reuse would be structured to follow applicable guidelines for the treatment of historic properties.

Given the development of the Historic Complex Vision Statement and Goals, and early evaluation of the Lower Barn partnership opportunity, the work of the current Historic Complex Ad Hoc Committee is deemed to have concluded.

FISCAL IMPACT

The recommended action has no immediate fiscal impact. If approved, a modest project budget will be included in Fiscal Year 2025-26 (FY26) to support the formation of the partnership

agreement and any next steps that the District may need to lead related to the Lower Barn rehabilitation work (e.g., engineering peer review, environmental analysis, etc).

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](#))
- October 9, 2024: Board received an informational presentation on the Hawthorns Historic Complex Lower Barn Partnership feasibility work ([R-24-122](#), [meeting minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The decision to pursue a partnership to rehabilitate and program the Hawthorns Historic Complex Lower Barn does not constitute a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act. The future approval of repairs or new infrastructure associated with the Lower Barn may be subject to environmental review; this environmental analysis would be completed prior to Board consideration of these future actions.

NEXT STEPS

Pending Board direction, staff will work with the Whites to develop a partnership agreement and plan for rehabilitation and reuse of the Lower Barn and return to the Board with the terms and conditions for consideration of approval.

Other related next steps

Development of the Hawthorns Area Plan continues as a separate project.

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:

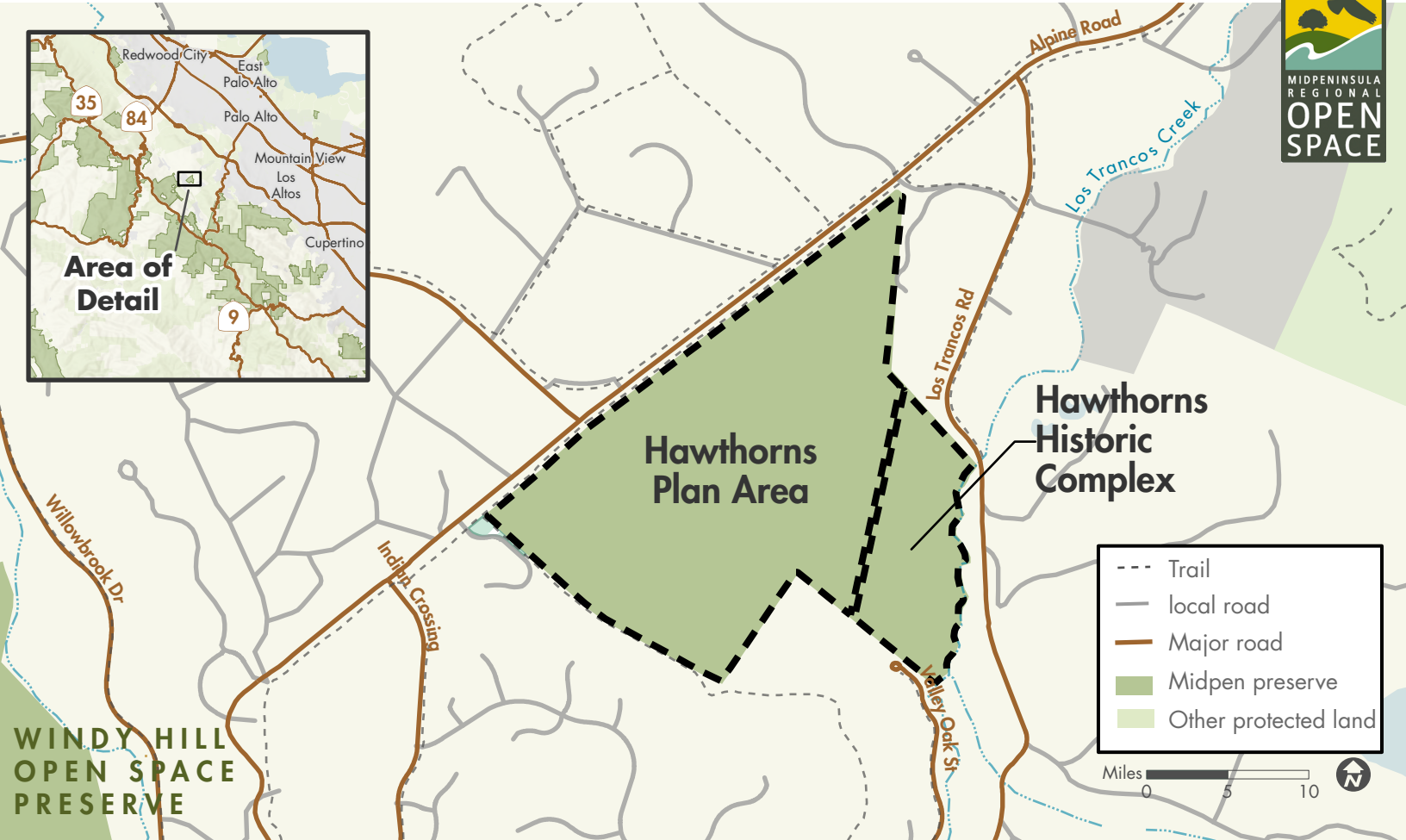
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Legend:

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



WINDY HILL
OPEN SPACE
PRESERVE