



Hawthorns Area of the Windy
Hill Open Space Preserve

Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group

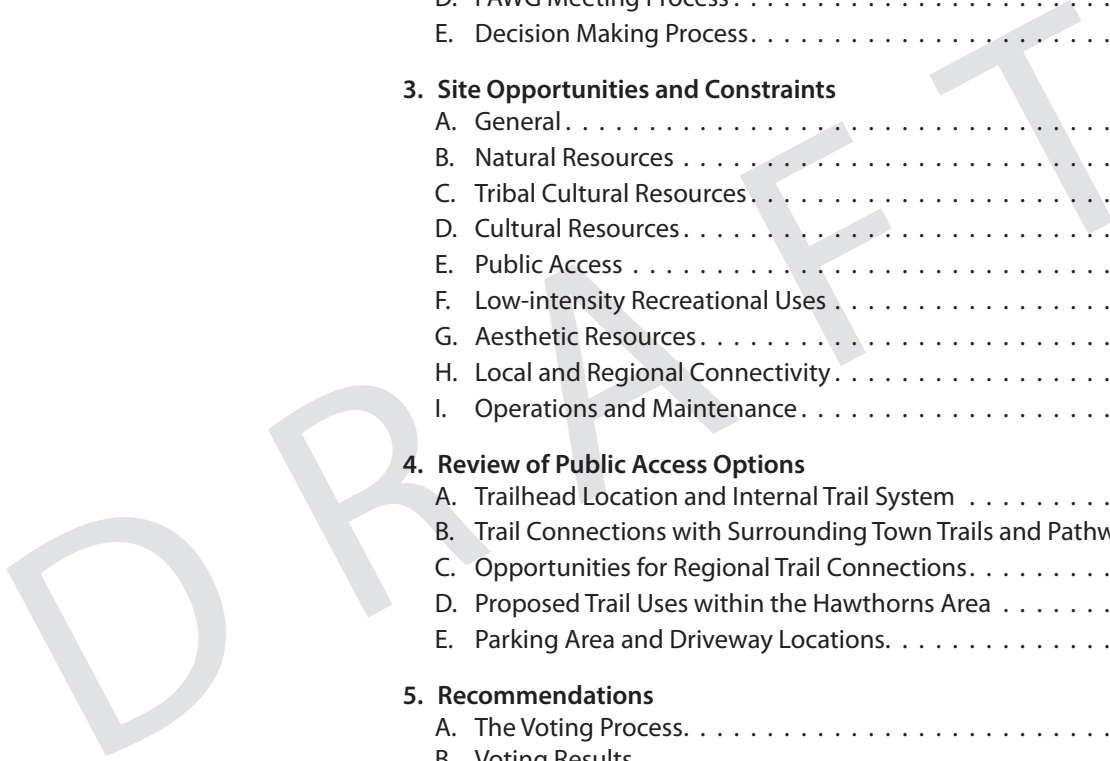
**RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT
and SUMMARY OF PROCESS**

September 6, 2024



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Mission Statement

“Midpen’s mission is to acquire a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.”

1. Introduction

The 79-acre Hawthorns property was protected from development when it was gifted to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) in 2011. The Hawthorns Area is part of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve, located within the Town of Portola Valley.

Since 2021, Midpen has been engaged in a multi-year phased planning effort with a focus on opening the preserve to the public. The intention is to open the Hawthorns Area to low-intensity, ecologically sensitive public access, providing a trail system and optimizing opportunities for multimodal access to the property. To establish the framework for a comprehensive use and management plan for the property, Midpen's Board of Directors approved its *Vision and Goals* for the Hawthorns Area on March 23, 2022. The existing conditions that support this intention, along with the PAWG structure and charge, were approved by the Board on April 26, 2023.

Midpen's Board directed staff to initiate a public process to engage a group of community members from throughout the Midpen district to investigate and evaluate options for providing public access to the Hawthorns Area. The goal of this group, named the Hawthorns Public Access Working Group (PAWG), was to identify access options, and why these options were preferred. Recommendations from the group will be forwarded, along with public feedback, to the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) for consideration and subsequently to the Board for final policy decisions.

This report describes the PAWG's process, its organization and implementation over a 12-month period, and the resulting conclusions and recommendations that emerged from its deliberations. The public was invited to attend and comment at all PAWG meetings.

The Hawthorns Area is subject to a conservation easement granted to Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), under which Midpen now operates. The easement allows low-intensity and ecologically sensitive recreation and defines limits on potential future development of the property.

Following the body of the report are Appendices that provide detailed information about the PAWG process.

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. Midpen will protect and manage natural, scenic, cultural and open space resources at the Hawthorns Area and provide ecologically sensitive public access consistent with Midpen’s mission and allowable uses outlined in the property’s conservation easement.”



2. Process

A. Purpose and Charge

The purpose of the PAWG was to establish an interactive forum of local and regional perspectives to collaborate with Midpen on a public access plan at the Hawthorns Area that is consistent with the Board-adopted *Vision and Goals*.

Phase 1: The Board approved the *Vision and Goals* for the Hawthorns Area in March 2022 to create low-intensity, ecologically sensitive public access, provide a trail system, and optimize opportunities for multimodal access to the property.

Through the Working Group process, the following public access components were evaluated:

- Trailhead location(s) and internal trail system
- Trail connections with surrounding Town trails and pathways
- Opportunities for regional trail connections
- Proposed trail uses within the Hawthorns Area
- Parking area and driveway location(s)

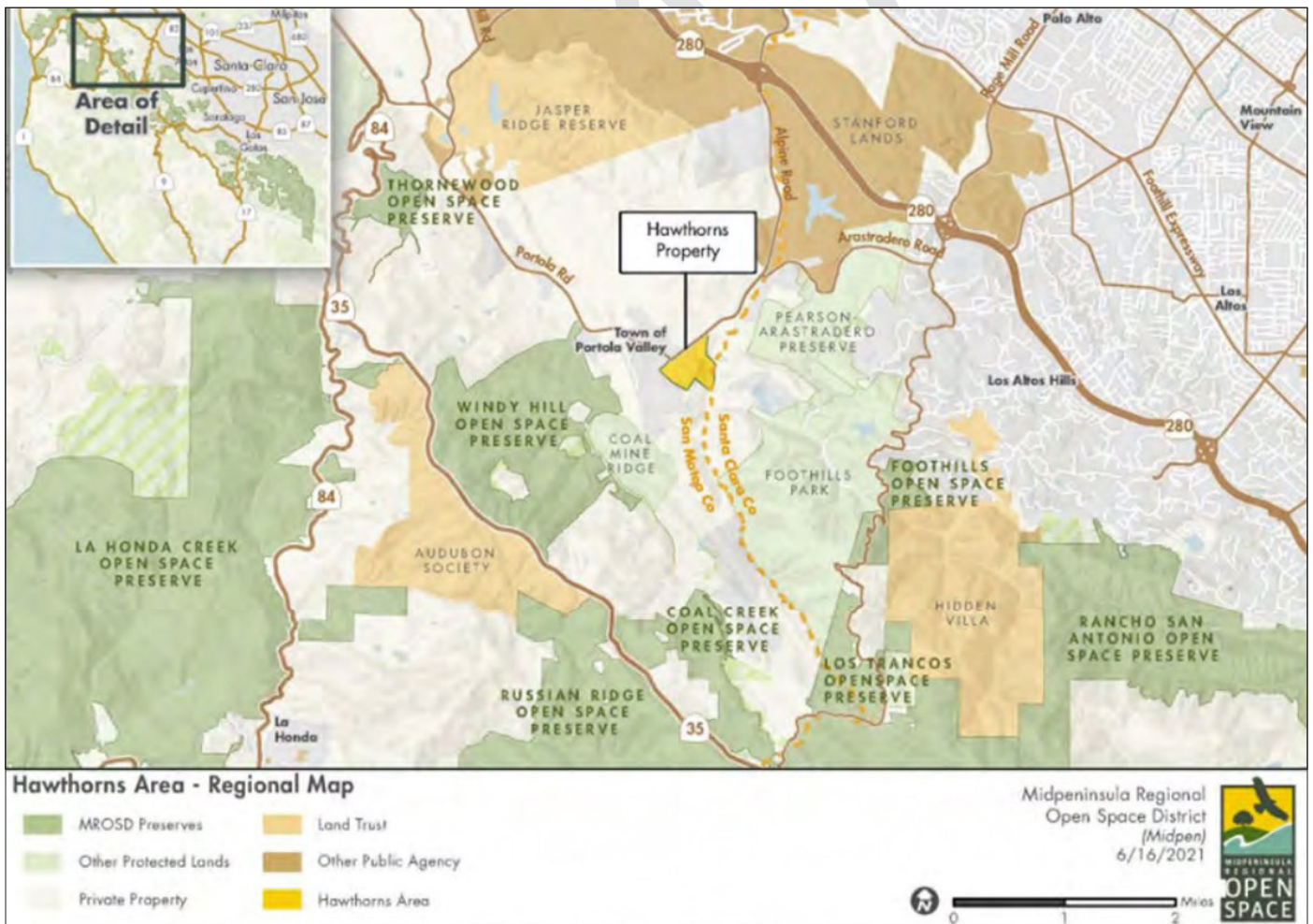


Figure 1: Hawthorns Area Regional and Location Map

The PAWG was charged with identifying the best solution given Midpen's mission, project vision and goals, site constraints and public input, while also thinking about the desired visitor experiences at the Hawthorns property. Natural resources protection was a key focus throughout the PAWG process. Ultimately, the PAWG evaluated a series of challenging planning issues, weighed possible tradeoffs, and developed their recommendations.

Through their discussions, the PAWG developed conceptual design alternatives and recommendations for the Planning and Natural Resources Committee to review and convey to the Board. With Board approval, the preferred alternative will ultimately be incorporated into the Hawthorns Area Plan (a Comprehensive Use and Management Plan for the Hawthorns Area) and advanced to the environmental review process.

HAWTHORNS AREA GOALS

1. **Natural Resources:** Protect and restore native habitat and manage for ecological resiliency of aquatic and terrestrial habitat, wildlife connectivity, and other natural resources.
2. **Public Access:** Open the Hawthorns Area to low-intensity public access, provide an internal trail system, and provide multimodal access to the property.
3. **Local and Regional Connectivity:** Connect to adjacent public trails and explore opportunities for trail connections to regional open space lands.
4. **Natural and Cultural History:** Interpret the rich natural, cultural and historic features and pursue partnerships to manage the property's natural and cultural history.
5. **Aesthetics:** Highlight scenic viewpoints and design recreational amenities while protecting scenic viewsheds.
6. **Operations and Maintenance:** 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 Midpen's Good Neighbor Policy.

B. Project Goals and Objectives

To achieve a comprehensive set of well-informed recommendations, the PAWG considered a wide range of public access issues informed by a range of technical studies, the conservation easement and related documents, as well as the *Vision and Goals*.

The supporting technical documents aimed to inform, frame, and guide the programming and conceptual planning phase of the project and the activities of the PAWG itself. Chief among these documents are the *Public Access Framework*, the *Existing Conditions/Opportunities and Constraints Report*, and the *Hawthorns Area Transportation Study*, as well as the conservation easement.

The six project goals relate directly to the purpose of the PAWG as described in the side bar or opposite page.

The *Public Access Framework* encompasses natural, cultural, and aesthetic resource management actions; public access considerations; and ongoing operations and maintenance needs. It considers diversity, equity, and inclusion, and notes concerns regarding climate change.

The *Existing Conditions/Opportunities and Constraints Report* describes the site's opportunities and constraints, particularly pertaining to future resource management and public access. Based on technical studies and public input obtained during an earlier project phase, it summarizes the environmental characteristics, operations and maintenance activities, allowed and permitted uses stipulated by the existing conservation easement on the property, and site restoration projects undertaken since Midpen officially acquired the Hawthorns Area.

The *Hawthorns Area Transportation Study* documents the existing transportation conditions, and estimates future use and the amount of parking needed at the Hawthorns Area. It evaluates site access, including potential driveway locations, and sight distances for driveway approaches for the future parking area.

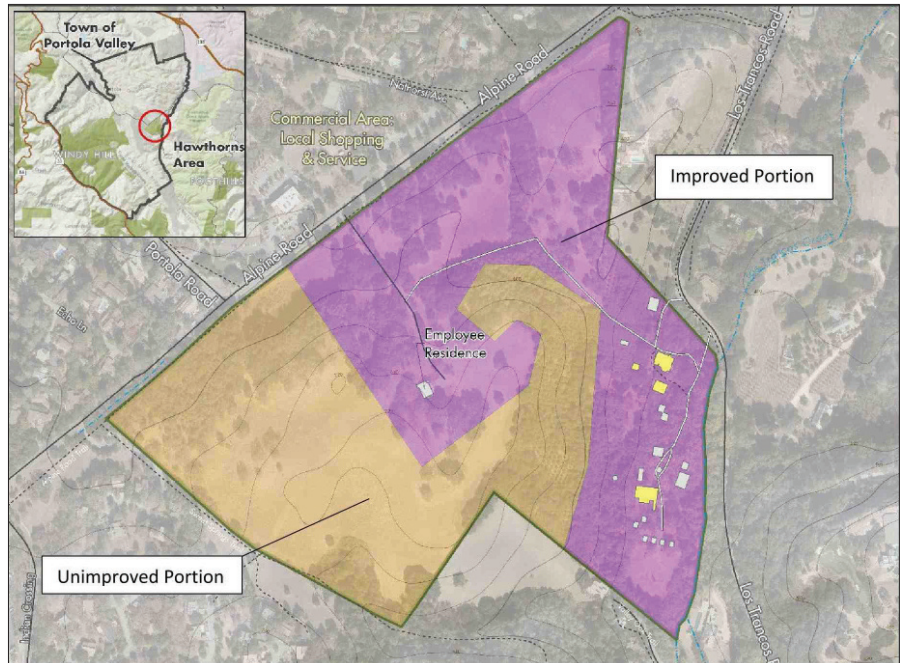


Figure 2. Hawthorns Area Improved and Unimproved Areas per the Conservation Easement (2005)

The Hawthorns Area is subject to a **conservation easement** granted in 2005 by the Woods Family Trust to POST. (Figure 2) This easement allows low-intensity recreational uses and related development that align with improvements typically offered at other Midpen preserves, such as trails, split-rail fences, parking areas, vault restrooms, and directional signage. Other forms of development are generally restricted by the conservation easement. Specifically, Section 6(i) of the conservation easement states the following:

“If the (Hawthorns Area) is ever conveyed to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, or any similar governmental or non-governmental entity intending to use the (Hawthorns Area) for public open space and passive recreational uses, construction of a limited staging (gravel parking lot, pit toilets, wood rail fencing, trail markers etc.) around the perimeter of the Improved Portion as necessary to facilitate public access to, and of use of, the (Hawthorns Area) for hiking and other uses permitted by this easement.”

As evident in the conservation easement plan, a group of historic buildings and features form the Hawthorns Historic Complex in the southeast corner of the property. This area is undergoing a separate planning process and is excluded from the public access considerations of the PAWG.

C. PAWG Formation Process and Members

The formation and operation of Hawthorns Area PAWG followed the 2019 – 2020 La Honda PAWG process, with adjustments tailored specifically to the project and community context. While La Honda PAWG focused on site selection for future feasibility study work, the Hawthorns Area PAWG focused on site selection and concept design work.

During the PAWG formation process, Midpen staff developed the composition, recruitment, and formation strategy of the PAWG, which was reviewed by the Midpen General Manager and the Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee, and ultimately approved by the Board of Directors on April 26, 2023 (R-23-44). As part of the recruitment efforts, Midpen staff created informational flyers, attended tabling events, and facilitated a Q&A session during the open application process. The Board reviewed the 21 applications received, interviewed candidates, and selected six Interest Area Representatives. The project team also asked the Portola Valley Town Manager for a liaison from the Town Council and the Board President for a liaison from the Board.

The criteria to be a PAWG member include possessing the skills and background necessary to contribute meaningfully to the PAWG, and the ability to commit to the meetings and activities during the PAWG’s tenure. PAWG members reflect a balanced array of Midpen interests and perspectives, aligning with Board Policy 6.08 on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Members demonstrate their ability and



PAWG members at MROSD Administrative Offices.

Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

interest in collaborating with Midpen, its partners, and peer agencies, meeting the public access goals for the Hawthorns Area identified in the project's *Vision and Goals*, as well as Midpen's *Open Space Vision Plan* (2012).

On June 28, 2023 (R-23-75), the Board appointed 15 members to serve on the PAWG. The PAWG's 15 members consisted of 13 voting members (seven Ward Stakeholders and six Interest Area Representatives) and two non-voting members (a Midpen Board Liaison and a Town Liaison). Table 1 outlines the PAWG composition (Appendix D).

To facilitate the meetings and guide the process, Midpen hired Cathy Garrett, president of PGAdesign, as the facilitator. Additionally, Midpen staff hired a design consultant, Paul Stevenson, a landscape architect with CSW|ST2, to develop conceptual site plan alternatives in collaboration with the PAWG, and a traffic consultant, Andrew Lee, a traffic engineer with Parametrix, to conduct traffic analyses.

Table 1: Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group Composition					
No.	Member Type	Representation	Member Name	Recruitment Pathway	Voting Member
6	Interest Area Representative	May represent one or more of the following interest areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community interests Neighborhoods Safe routes to school Local and regional trail connections Resource conservation Recreational uses Interpretation/education 	Bryna Chang Tyler Feld Charlie Krenz Rachel Oslund David Smernoff Karen Vahtra	Application and Board selection	yes
7	Ward stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represent regional perspectives balanced with both ward and local interests Understanding of Midpen's mission 	Ward 1: Scott Mosher Ward 2: Vivian Neou Ward 3: Willie Wool Ward 4: Sandy Sommer Ward 5: Jeff Greenfield Ward 6: Helen Quinn Ward 7: Kerry De Benedetti	Board appointment	yes
1	Board Liaison	Midpen mission and interests	Margaret MacNiven, Ward 6	Board appointment	no
1	Town Liaison*	Town interests	Sarah Wernikoff, Mayor	Town appointment	no

* Judith Hasko attended one of the PAWG meetings as alternate Town Liaison in Sarah Wernikoff's absence.

D. PAWG Meeting Process

Midpen staff and the consultant team supported the PAWG through a series of seven working meetings over one year. The PAWG's meetings were governed by the Brown Act, and two public comment periods allowed the public to provide feedback at the beginning and end of each meeting. All agendas, meeting summaries, presentations, and materials provided to the PAWG were posted on the project website. Official agenda packets, meeting summaries, and public comments are available on Midpen's public portal:

<https://portal.lasercache.com/Portal/Browse.aspx?id=22252&repo=r-5197d798>

In addition to the regularly scheduled meetings, PAWG members worked between meetings to review project materials and complete homework assignments that documented their impressions and preferences regarding trail alignments, uses, and parking and driveway options (Appendix A). PAWG members also visited the project site in November 2023 when staff facilitated two non-quorum site visits. PAWG members actively participated in shaping the meeting process, periodically requesting additional information from the Midpen project team, suggesting homework assignments for the entire group, and recommending potential additional parking locations for further study. In addition, the PAWG as a group reviewed and provided feedback on the meeting summaries, with the Co-Chairs reviewing meeting agendas, draft meeting summaries, and key discussion points.

Design Process

CSW developed and refined a total of ten conceptual parking area and driveway designs, incorporating feedback from the PAWG and the public throughout the PAWG process (Appendix A). Parametrix collected additional data at the PAWG's request and completed an analysis of the transportation opportunities and constraints for the Hawthorns Area. The Midpen trail crew identified a conceptual loop trail alignment with a gentle grade of 5 to 8%, which was verified in the field and considered a variety of site constraints identified in the *Public Access Framework*. The PAWG suggested additional trail options during the process, which were incorporated in a conceptual trail design map.

Community and Town Engagement

All seven PAWG meetings included two public comment periods for the public to speak, one at the beginning and a second at the end of each meeting. The PAWG meetings drew considerable public interest. Midpen staff received 153 written public comments on the project during the PAWG process, including follow-up feedback and thoughts submitted by PAWG members between meetings, as of 4:00 PM on June 13, 2024. The majority of the comments were submitted by local town residents and committees. The primary concerns raised were related to traffic safety, natural resources protection, viewshed and aesthetics, as well as trail connections.



Photo Credit: Cathy Garrett

Engagement with the Portola Valley Ad Hoc Hawthorns Committee (Town Ad Hoc) is one way in which the Town has been engaged as part of the planning process. This focus committee consists of representatives from seven Town committees, brought together by the Town to provide feedback on this project. Members of the Ad Hoc Committee have been attending PAWG meetings and providing both oral and written comments.

Following the presentation of preferred alternatives to PNR, the project team will seek input from the Town Ad Hoc, Town Council, and the Planning Commission for feedback. The compiled feedback will then be presented to the Board during subsequent meetings for further consideration. This process ensures that decision-making is informed by comprehensive input.

The summary Table 2 below shows the dates, locations, and topics covered in the series of meetings. A more detailed description of each meeting follows.

Table 2: Meeting Dates, Location and Topic		
Meeting	Meeting Date and Location	Topics
1	Thursday July 27, 2023 Midpen Office	Meeting 1: Kickoff Established Working Group roles, goals, workplan, schedule, and operating procedures. Received public feedback.
2	Saturday August 26, 2024 Site Tour	Meeting 2: Site meeting Conducted in-person site meeting and reviewed existing site conditions. Received public feedback. RSVPs requested for planning logistics.
3	Thursday October 26, 2023 Midpen Office	Meeting 3: Preliminary design discussion PAWG discussed and provided input on draft parking and driveway design options 1 - 4, as well as internal connections, trailheads, trail uses, and local and regional connectivity opportunities. Received public feedback. Selected two co-chairs.
4	Thursday December 16, 2023 Midpen Office	Meeting 4: Continuation of preliminary design discussion PAWG continued discussion on initial conceptual design alternatives including parking and driveway options 4 - 6, internal trail system and connections, trailheads, trail uses, and local and regional connectivity opportunities. Received public feedback.
5	Thursday February 29, 2024 Midpen Office	Meeting 5: Continuation of December 16, 2023 design discussion PAWG discussed updated conceptual design alternatives including parking and driveway options 7 - 8, internal trail system and connections, trailheads, trail uses, and local and regional connectivity opportunities. Received public feedback.
6	Saturday March 24, 2024 Site Meeting	Meeting 6: Site meeting and design discussion PAWG reviewed and discussed conceptual parking design options 7 – 9 on site. Received public feedback. RSVPs requested for planning logistics.
7	Thursday June 13, 2024 Midpen Office	Meeting 7: Discuss and confirm recommendation PAWG discussed design option 10 and confirmed recommendations on concept trail alignment, trail uses, opportunities for regional trail connections, and concept parking alternatives to forward to Midpen’s PNR Committee and subsequently to the Board for consideration. Received public feedback.

PAWG Meeting 1: July 27, 2023

At its initial meeting, the PAWG reviewed the project goals and objectives, the group's purpose and charge, ground rules and operating procedures, and the anticipated work plan and schedule through 2024. The project team provided each PAWG member with background materials about the PAWG, Midpen, the open space preserves, and associated technical studies.

To ensure the PAWG's work would be aligned and consistent with Midpen's mission, planning and policy documents, and previous work prepared for the project, Midpen staff provided a presentation highlighting Midpen's mission, the *Vision Plan for Windy Hill Open Space Preserve*, and technical studies, including the *Existing Conditions Opportunities and Constraints* report, the *Transportation Study*, the *Public Access Framework*, and the *Constraints Map*.



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

PAWG Meeting 2: August 26, 2023

Building upon the background materials shared in July, the PAWG's August site tour—attended by over 40 members of the public—allowed the PAWG to familiarize themselves with site conditions, observe the Alpine Road frontage, consider access opportunities both within the preserve and adjacent to Town of Portola Valley trails (Alpine and Sweet Springs Trails), and assess where to accommodate parking and access points from Alpine Road (figure 3).

The site tour consisted of seven stops including:

- The "Hawthorns meadow," a grassy area within the site
- The northeast area of the property near Alpine Road
- The Alpine Trail near the historic entry drive
- The Alpine Trail at the existing entry drive
- The summit of the site (for consideration of possible vista points)
- A second summit facing Windy Hill and the Town
- The boundary with the historic complex that lies outside the Hawthorns Area portion that will be initially opened to public access.

The Midpen-led team drew attention to key issues of the property for the PAWG to keep in mind during their work, including views to and from the property, trails (Alpine Trail, the proposed internal loop and spur trails, and connections to trails adjacent to the Hawthorns Area), possible preserve use types (hikers, equestrians, dogs on leash, bikers, children, and adults), driveway access, safety and security, and natural and cultural resources.

PAWG Meeting 4: December 16, 2023

The PAWG continued their discussions regarding trail and parking concepts, and the conceptual internal loop trail, including review of additional trails suggested by PAWG members, such as spur trails to viewpoints, connections to Town trails, and Alpine Trail realignment. The design team presented two additional parking and driveway options, Options 5 and 6, still located within existing meadows on the property but reduced in scale from the previous Options 1, 2, and 3. Midpen’s Natural Resources staff provided an overview of natural resource considerations related to proposed parking Options 4, 5, and 6, based on Midpen’s Basic Policy and Resource Management Policies.

Topics of concern regarding the possible driveway access points on Alpine Road included the gradient on Alpine Road, the amount of tree cover and associated shade that may impact motorist and bicyclist visibility, the speed of traffic, the quantity of bicyclists, and traffic safety. Los Trancos Road was not considered as a point of access because of line-of-sight constraints that make it unsuitable for a general public access driveway. The PAWG’s main concerns related to parking and driveway access were traffic safety, natural resource protection, and aesthetics.

PAWG Meeting 5: February 29, 2024

PAWG discussions continued about the topics and issues raised in December. The design team developed two additional parking and driveway options, Options 7 and 8, in response to the PAWG’s traffic safety and natural resource concerns about the prior six parking options. Parametrix also presented additional traffic data collected at the request of the PAWG. The design refinements in Options 7 and 8 reduced the natural resource impacts, overall parking area footprint, driveway length, amount of grading needed, and improved vehicular, bicyclist, and pedestrian safety.

The PAWG reviewed Options 7 and 8 against the project’s Board-approved *Vision and Goals*, and began assessing initial overall preferences of the group through informal polling on conceptual trail segments, possible trail uses, bench locations, and conceptual parking options. This revealed areas of consensus and debate on possible uses and an interest from a majority in recommending Options 7 and 8 be forwarded to the PNR.



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

PAWG Meeting 6: March 24, 2024

At the request of the PAWG, this meeting was held on site for the PAWG to obtain public feedback and to re-visit areas that had been key topics of discussion at earlier meetings . Specific topics included potential trail connections to Sweet Springs Trail, bench locations, and conceptual parking Options 7, 8, and 9 (the design team developed Option 9 in response to a suggestion from two PAWG members received after February’s meeting).

The site meeting consisted of four stops including:

- The proposed Bench “B” location
- The junction of the existing drive and the Hawthorns Meadow
- The junction of the existing driveway and Alpine Road
- The gate of the historic driveway.

The group also made an impromptu detour to a secondary lower knoll closer to Sweet Springs Trail, allowing PAWG members to stand at a lower elevation and observe the relationship between the proposed trails and houses located in Portola Valley Ranch.

The project team shared a variety of considerations related to Options 7, 8, and 9, including potential impacts on natural resources, relative quantities of grading needed, opportunities for connectivity from Hawthorns trails to Town of Portola Valley trails, and traffic concerns along Alpine Road.



Photo Credit: Gali Basson

PAWG Meeting 7: June 13, 2024

In preparation for discussion and voting, PAWG members individually assessed Options 7, 8, 9, and 10 prior to the meeting using the Board-approved project goals. This included assessing possible impacts to natural and cultural resources, safety at driveway access points, the visitor experience, local and regional trail connectivity, aesthetics, operations and maintenance, and other considerations. PAWG assessments and contributions were compiled into the “Midpen Assessment of Conceptual Parking Design Options” which compared, summarized, and identified points of support and concern for each option.

PAWG members reviewed Option 9, which was expanded to include 50 parking spaces, and Option 10, a new option conceived of at the site visit in June, which located the driveway entrance to the intersection of Portola Road and Alpine Road. The PAWG discussed specific trail segments and uses, accounting for the public comments received throughout the process. During the voting process, they deliberated, modified, and voted on the final recommendations to be forwarded to the PNR Committee for consideration.

The PAWG voted on the following categories:

- Internal trail system
- Trail connections
- Opportunities for regional trail connections
- Proposed trail uses
- Parking areas

The voting results demonstrated a strong accord among the 13 voting members of the PAWG on their final recommendations. See Chapter 5 Recommendations for specifics of the voting results, which illustrates both a broad-brush and fine-grained understanding of the PAWG’s recommendations.

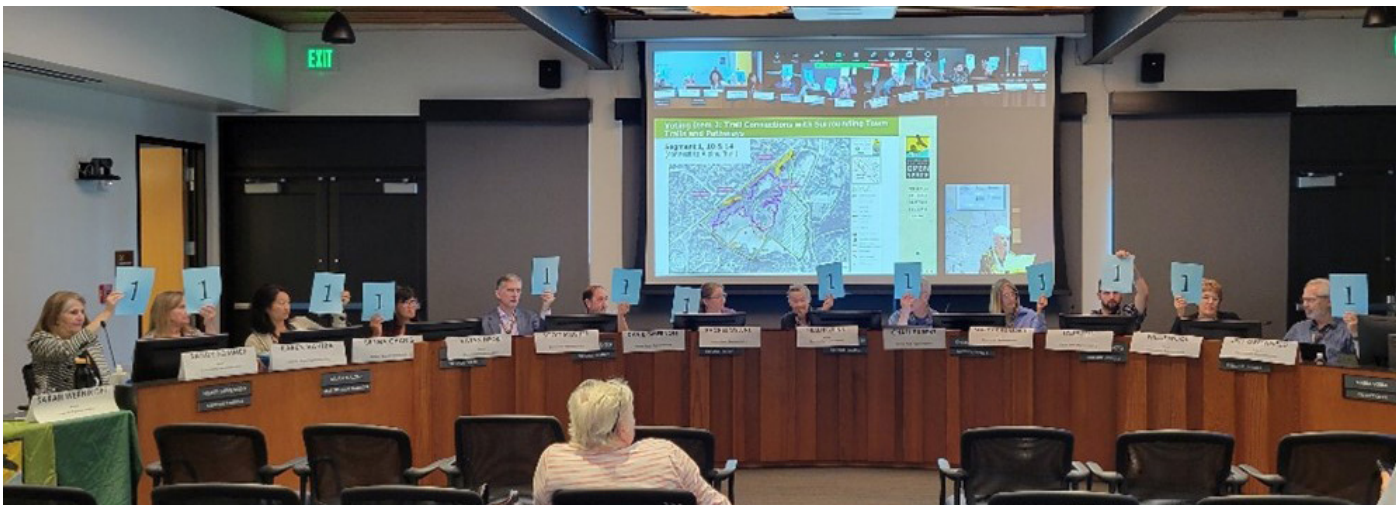


Photo Credit: Paul Stevenson

The Gradients of Agreement include:

1. I can say an unqualified “yes” to the recommendation
2. I find the proposal acceptable. It appears to be the best of the available options at this time.
3. I can live with the proposal, although I am not especially enthusiastic about it.
4. I do not fully agree with the proposal, but I am willing to stand aside, remain neutral, so the process can move forward.
5. I do not fully agree with the proposal. I have some suggestions and I would like the working group to do more work to see if we can reach a higher level of agreement.
6. I do not agree with the proposal, and I will work actively to oppose it.

E. Decision Making Process

The ground rules and operating procedures (Appendix C) for the PAWG established that the group would strive to make decisions and recommendations through a respectful and consensus-based process, consensus being defined as general agreement by all members present when a decision item was on the meeting agenda. The Co-Chairs presided over the meetings, which were facilitated by Midpen staff and facilitator Cathy Garrett. Guided by the facilitator, the PAWG signaled their level of support for topics using a scoring system based on the Gradients of Agreement described to the right. The Gradients of Agreement (see Sidebar) are a mechanism for testing the level of agreement on a proposal that expands on the traditional “yes” or “no” voting.

The Working Group also used informal voting to test the level of support prior to their final voting. By employing the Gradients of Agreement, the Working Group sought to determine if there were general support or not, and what, if anything, may be modified or proposed to gain a higher level of consensus prior to official voting.

Values from “1” to “4” on the Gradients of Agreement are considered supportive of a proposal. Full consensus is reached if all members are between a “1” and “4” on the Gradients of Agreement scale. Majority consensus is reached if a simple majority of all members are between “1” and “4” on the Gradients of Agreement scale.

DRAFT



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

3. Site Opportunities and Constraints

The PAWG's exploration of public access opportunities at the Hawthorns property was informed and influenced by a wide range of site constraints and opportunities identified by technical studies mentioned in this report and in the appendices. The property has considerable constraints, including steep topography, limited options for parking/driveway access, aesthetic considerations, and potential impacts to natural and cultural resources.

Following is a compilation of data contained in the technical studies, input from Midpen subject matter experts, and public feedback from the community engagement process that informed the PAWG's work and decision-making. Specifically, it includes the 6 goals from the *Vision and Goals*, items addressed in the *Public Access Framework* and additional topics raised during discussions.

A. General

Opportunities:

- Resource and land management guidelines for the Hawthorns Area may help Midpen protect and restore native habitat, reduce wildland fire risk, and support ecological resilience and wildlife connectivity.
- Midpen partnerships with other stakeholders such as the Town of Portola Valley, tribes, peer agencies, and non-profits, may enable them to fulfill the property's vision and goals.
- Maintenance and operation guidelines for the Hawthorns Area may support the long-term stewardship of the property and meet public safety objectives in alignment with the Midpen's Good Neighbor Policy.
- Opportunities for collaboration and support from communities include adjacent neighbors, the broader community of the Town of Portola Valley, recreational interest groups, schools, and local businesses. Concurrently, stakeholder engagement presents considerations for how best to incorporate public access.

Constraints:

- The Conservation Easement on the property limits the uses and management activities Midpen can consider for the Hawthorns Area (Figure 4).



Photo Credit: Marie Lanka

B. Natural Resources

Opportunities:

- Utilize sites within already developed or disturbed areas within the preserve for public access infrastructure.
- Position public access and facilities to minimize detrimental impact to vegetation communities. This includes minimizing tree removals, avoiding fragmentation of habitat areas, preventing proliferation of invasive species, and preventing shrub encroachment on grasslands.
- Design to avoid barriers to wildlife; use wildlife-friendly fencing.

Constraints:

- Potential impacts to vegetation (including special status species), wildlife (including loss of habitat or barriers to movement), aquatic life, and wildfire resiliency from the siting of new public access infrastructure.
- Locate public access in areas outside the Los Trancos Creek riparian corridor and wetlands.

C. Tribal Cultural Resources

Opportunities:

- Engage in tribal consultation and partnership as appropriate during the public access development process.
- Locate public access outside areas with known tribal cultural resources to ensure public access avoids impacts to culturally sensitive indigenous resources.

Constraints:

- Protect against potential impacts to Native American resources.
- Limit public access to or near the property's tribal cultural resources to help ensure their long-term preservation.

D. Cultural Resources

Opportunities:

- Locate public access outside areas with known cultural resources, such as the Historic Complex, to ensure public access avoids impacts to culturally sensitive resources.

Constraints:

- Protect against potential impacts to sensitive cultural resources by limiting public access to or near the property's cultural and historical resources, helping ensure their long-term preservation.
- Ensure future uses of the Historic Complex are compatible with public access within the Hawthorns Area.

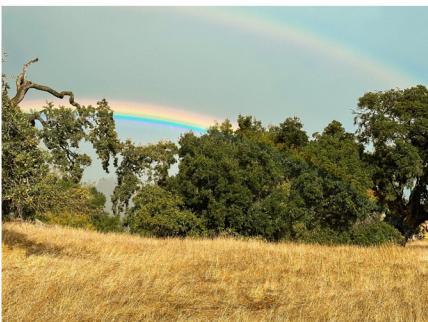


Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

E. Public Access

Opportunities:

- Highlight scenic viewpoints, such as views to San Francisco Bay and nearby open areas.
- Design low-intensity recreational amenities while sharing the property's rich natural, cultural, and historic resources with the public.
- Provide opportunities for low-intensity recreational uses, multimodal access, and local and regional trail connectivity through an internal trail system.
- Provide benches at locations to enhance public enjoyment of vista points.
- Consider accommodating transportation demand management strategies as appropriate (e.g. providing amenities to encourage non-automobile usage).
- Consider adjacent uses, potential user groups, and user perspectives in determining allowable uses within the Hawthorns Area to reduce management, conflict, and safety concerns.
- Incorporate materials that complement the Hawthorns Area's natural landscape where feasible.
- Utilize hardened surface materials in parking area to reduce likelihood of wildland fire ignitions.
- Provide a vault toilet near the on-site parking area outside of the 75-foot scenic corridor zone.
- Provide relevant signage where appropriate to guide and inform visitors (e.g. trail directional, trailhead signboard, interpretive, regulation, and resource management signs).

Constraints:

- Consider the site's topography, vegetation, and other natural features when determining an internal trail system. Ensure the internal trail system is financially and operationally sustainable and aligns with the Board's vision and goals.
- Develop parking, including location and materials, in alignment with the conservation easement, maintenance needs, and defensible space requirements.
- Site driveway(s) to the parking area with adequate lines of sight and consideration of local traffic and congestion patterns, including adjacent roadways and trails. Consider utilizing existing driveways to access potential parking as practical.
- Provide adequate separation between driveway access to parking from staff residence as achievable.
- Consider potential stormwater management (C3) requirements when locating on-site parking.



Photo Credit: Cathy Garrett

F. Low-intensity Recreational Uses

Opportunities:

- Provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public recreation including hiking and equestrian access.
- Evaluate dog-on-leash opportunities as feasible.
- Evaluate access by bicycles as appropriate.
- Seek Easy Access Trail opportunities as feasible.

Constraints:

- The Hawthorns property's limited size, steep topography, and sensitive ecological resources constrain the recreational amenities Midpen can offer.

G. Aesthetic Resources

Opportunities:

- Site public access amenities to protect viewsheds, including the Alpine Scenic Corridor.

Constraints:

- Minimize potential aesthetic impacts from new public access infrastructure and amenities at the Hawthorns Area.

H. Local and Regional Connectivity

Opportunities:

- Facilitate connections to local and regional trails for hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians, particularly to the Town of Portola Valley's trails.
- Seek opportunities to realign the Alpine Road Trail to offer a safer passage within the Alpine Road corridor.

Constraints:

- Consider possible realignment of the Alpine Trail in relation to driveway access and public safety on the trail.
- Minimize potential impacts to the Alpine Scenic Road Corridor in accordance with the Town of Portola Valley's Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan. These impacts may include development of trails, driveways, parking, site amenities, and signage.

I. Operations and maintenance

Opportunities:

- Site wildlife-friendly perimeter and internal fencing and gates to ensure appropriate public access, site security, aesthetics, and historic resource management goals.
- Maintain site security and fulfill public safety objectives that meet Midpen's Good Neighbor Policy by utilizing gates, fencing, dark-sky security lighting as needed, and signage on Midpen property.



Photo Credit: Cathy Garrett

- Site public access as stipulated by the Wildland Fire Resiliency Program, ensuring sufficient defensible space and safe access for emergency personnel.

Constraints:

- Safeguard privacy for the staff residence to the extent feasible when siting parking and trail infrastructure.
- Consider utilizing existing driveways and internal roads for public access and Midpen operations before developing new driveways.
- Site the parking area to facilitate access by law enforcement, ranger patrol, and emergency response personnel.
- Consider impacts to adjacent Town roadways when siting parking and trail connections (line of sight, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, etc.)
- Consider restrictions set by the conservation easement regarding improvement to onsite utilities (e.g. no electrical or sewer improvements).
- Restrict public access in areas with known environmental hazards, if any.

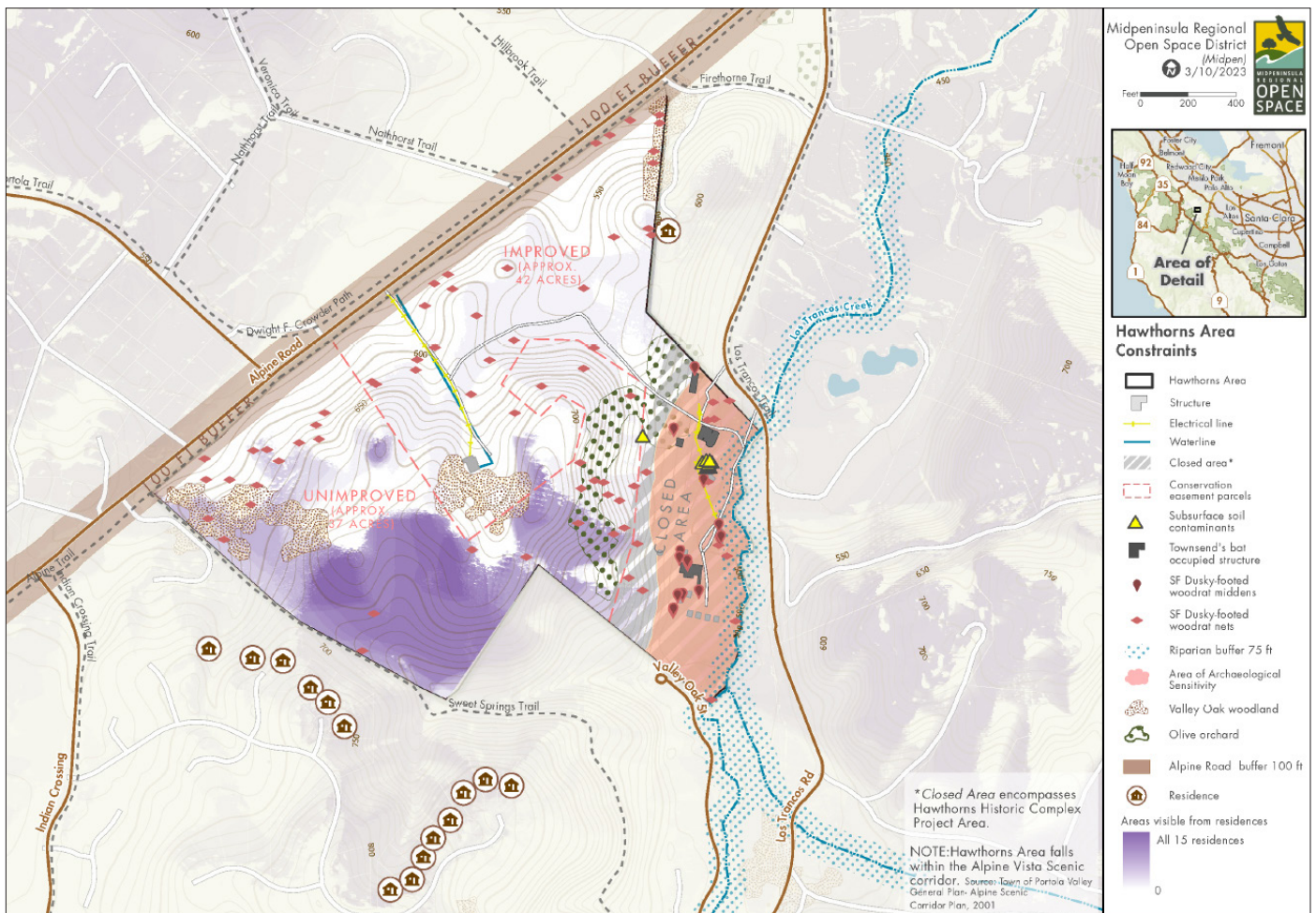


Figure 4. Hawthorns Public Access Constraints Map



Photo Credit: Marie Lanka

4. Review of Public Access Options

Over the one-year PAWG process, multiple options for public access at the Hawthorns Area were evaluated, including:

- Trailhead location and internal trail system
- Trail connections with surrounding Town trails and pathways
- Opportunities for regional trail connections
- Proposed trail uses within the Hawthorns Area
- Parking area and driveway location(s)

A. Trailhead Location and Internal Trail System

The proposed primary internal trail loop is supplemented with additional trail segments suggested by the PAWG, including links to vista points and bench locations and connections to adjacent regional trails (Figure 5). A key trail goal is to provide access to ecologically sensitive public recreation, especially via easy-access trails. Within the context of the topography, vegetation, and natural features at the Hawthorns property, a conceptual trail system was developed that accords with the Board-approved Hawthorns Area *Vision and Goals*. This conceptual trail design is also operationally sustainable, considers the user experience, and strives to accommodate a range of users' abilities. The alignment of the internal trail considers adjacent uses, potential user groups, and user perspectives.

Key trailhead and trail considerations include providing signage to guide visitors to the site, integrating views of natural beauty at outlooks, and siting vault toilets and amenities associated with the trailhead to minimize effects on viewsheds in the local vicinity.

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Figure 5. Hawthorns Area Conceptual Trail Design. (Note: While Midpen 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.)

B. Trail Connections with Surrounding Town Trails and Pathways

Midpen’s approach is to explore opportunities for local and regional trail connections that potentially supplement the proposed internal loop trail (Figures 6 and 7). Additionally, the General Plan of the Town of Portola Valley contains a Trails and Pathways element that advocates for interconnectivity where trails meet, including trails that extend beyond the town’s borders, such as at Midpen lands or into other cities.

The Hawthorns Area lies immediately adjacent to the Alpine Trail along Alpine Road and the Sweet Springs Trail at the edge of the adjacent residential area called Portola Valley Ranch. Both are part of the network of trails within the Town of Portola Valley.

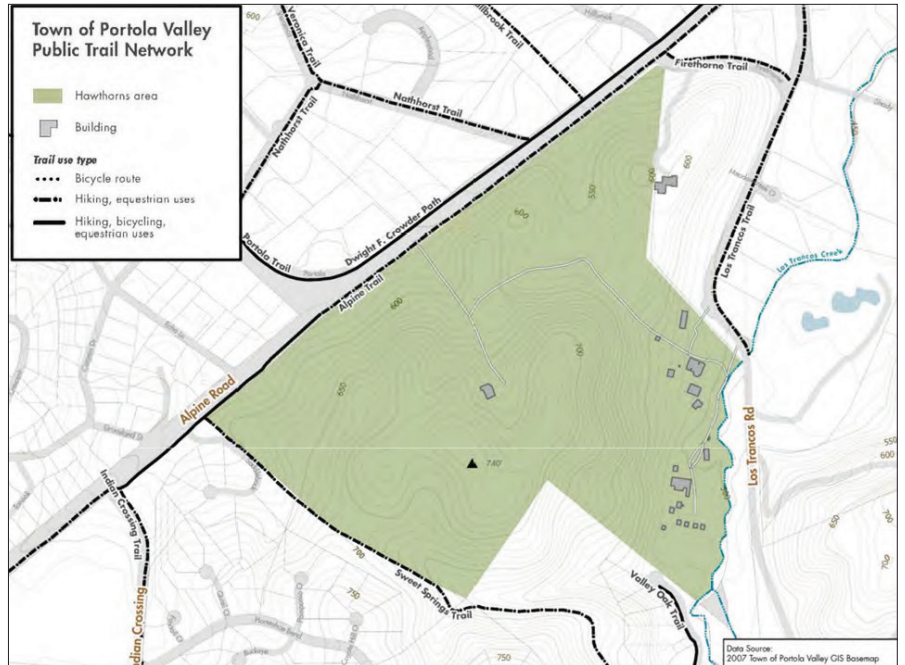


Figure 6. Town of Portola Valley Public Trail Network

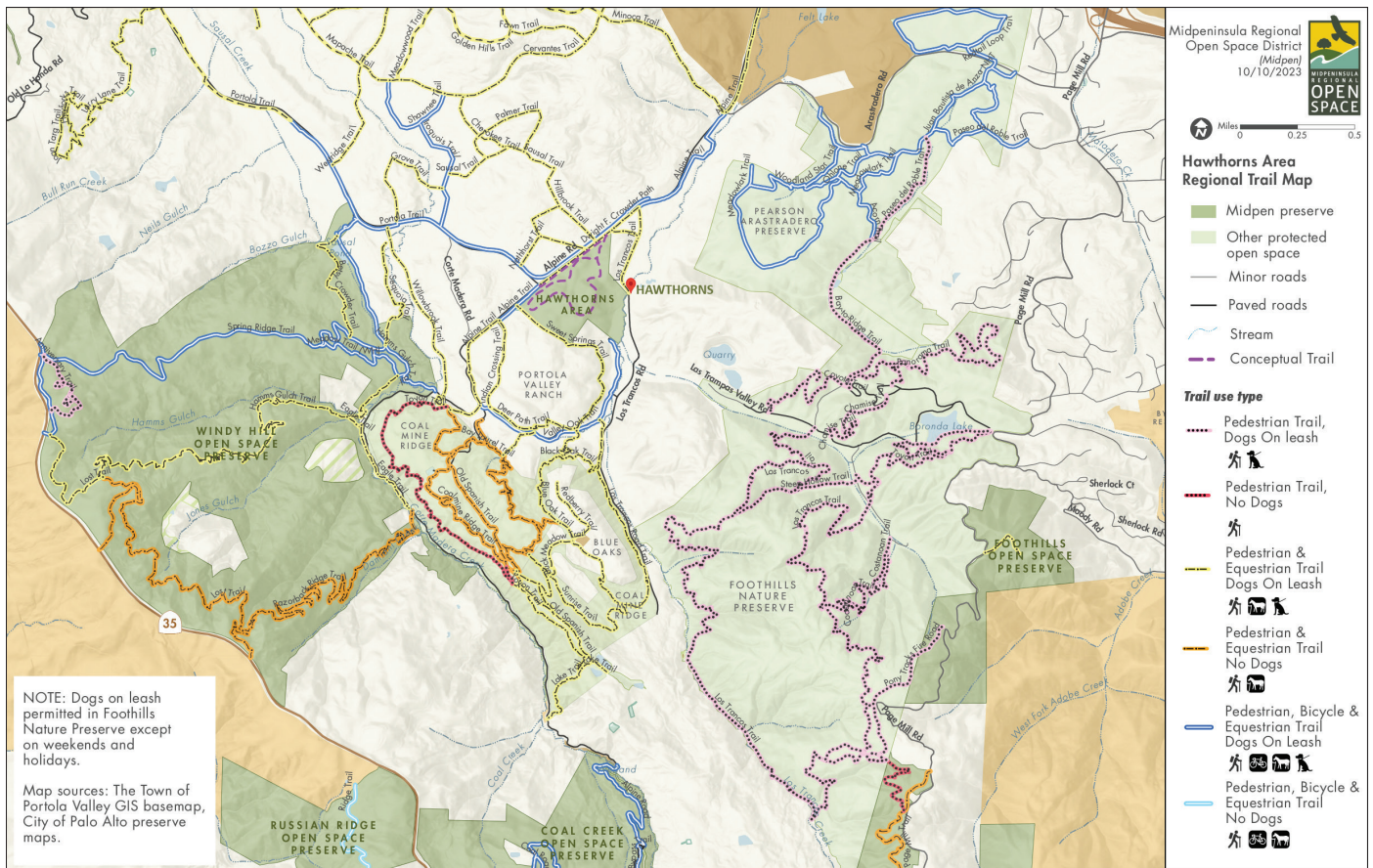


Figure 7. Hawthorns Area Regional Trail Map

C. Opportunities for Regional Trail Connections

To facilitate regional trail connectivity, Midpen fosters connections, or where feasible, contributes to possible future connections to trails serving the greater region. See Figure 7 Regional Trail Map.

D. Proposed Trail Uses within the Hawthorns Area

Under consideration by the PAWG were the type and character of different categories of users. Possible trail users at the Hawthorns property include hikers, dogs and dog walkers (both leashed and unleashed were considered), equestrians, and adults and children on bicycles. Each was considered given the preserve's size, the potential natural resource impacts, and whether they accord with the Board-approved *Vision and Goals*. For reference, the types of users at nearby and similarly sized preserves were compared.

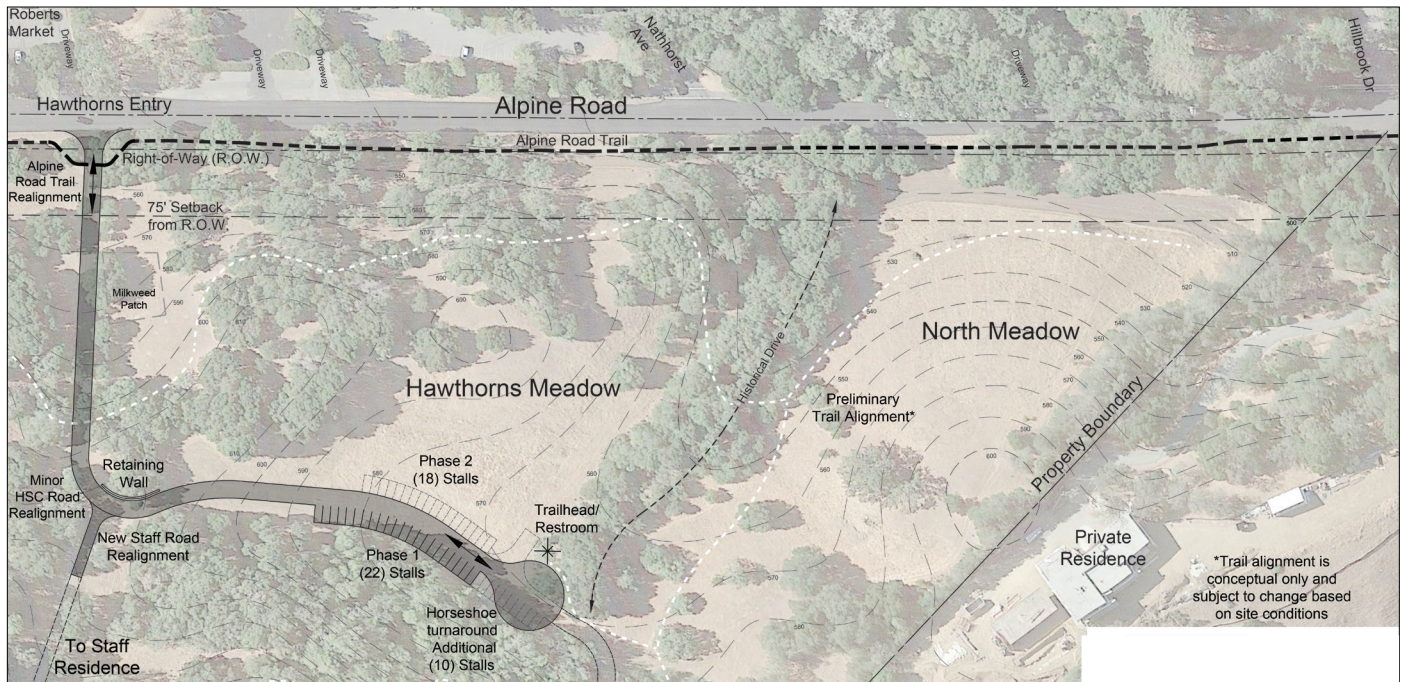


Figure 8. Parking Option #7.

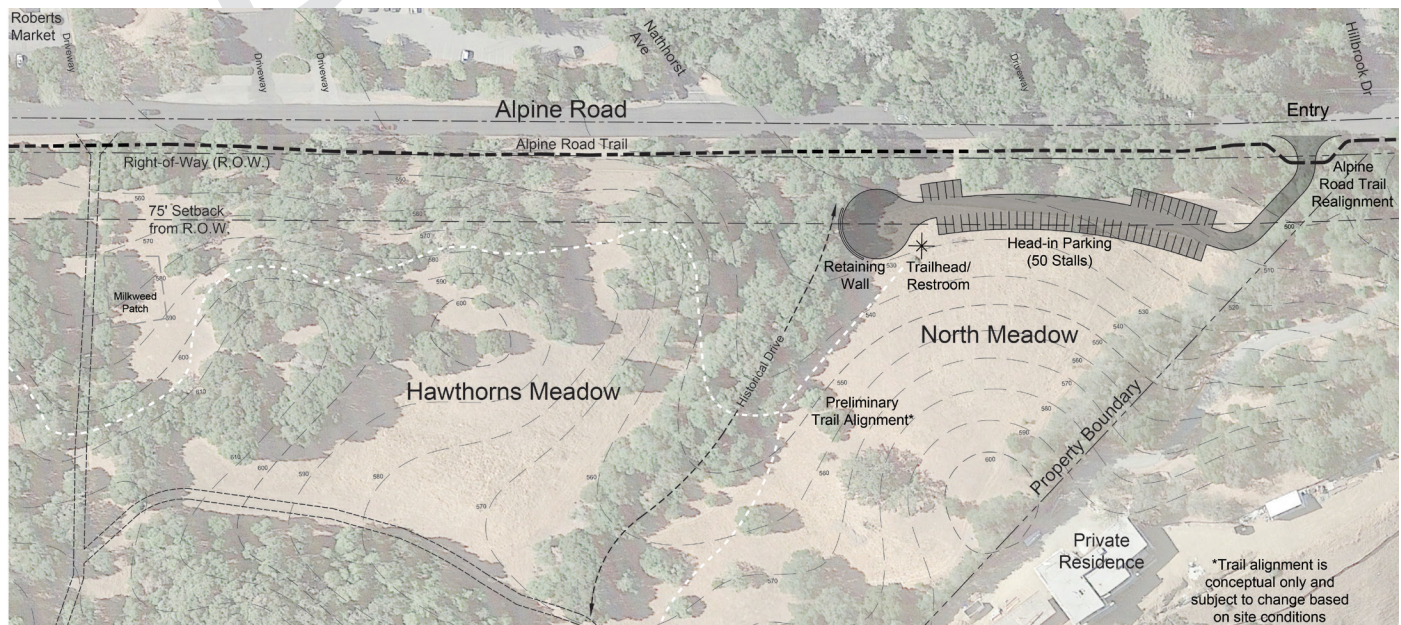


Figure 9. Parking Option #8.

E. Parking Area and Driveway Location(s)

Parking will invite public access into the preserve and support Midpen’s mission to serve a diverse and distributed population. For details of parking design, refer to Appendix A.

The parking analysis prepared by traffic engineers Parametrix was based in part on the size of the preserve and recommended parking for 25 to 68 cars. For planning purposes, the target was 50 spaces. This number may be refined depending on the number and nature of users visiting the Hawthorns Area.

Ten parking options were considered with a range of driveway locations. Of the ten options, four were brought forward for the PAWG to vote on. These were Options 7, 8, 9, and 10 (FIGURES 9-11)

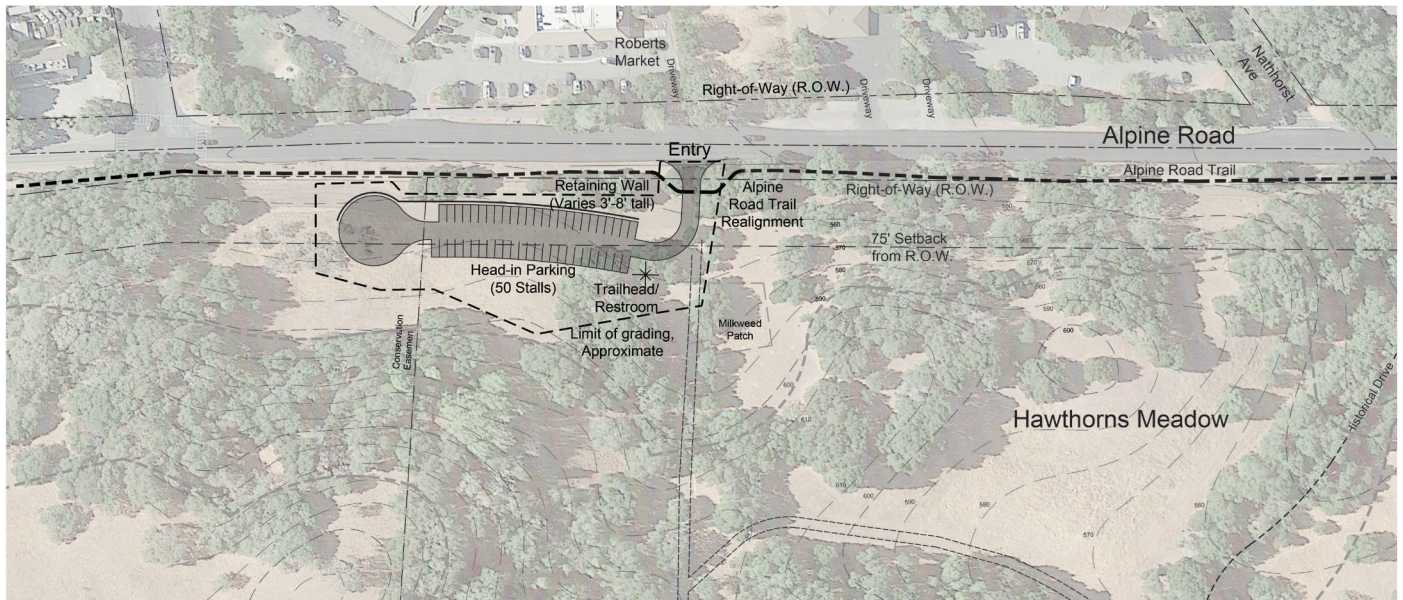


Figure 10. Parking Option #9.

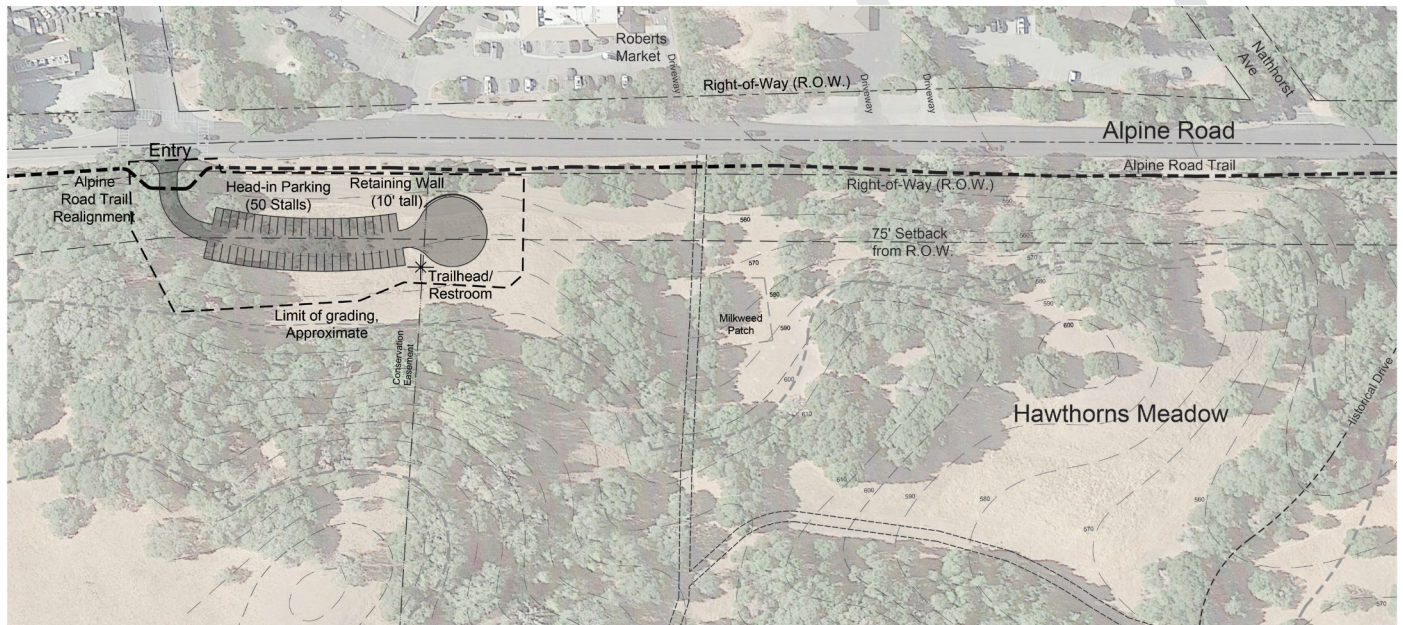


Figure 11. Parking Option #10.



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

5. Recommendations

A. The Voting Process

At their final meeting, the PAWG voted on a series of recommendations. To gather both a consensus overview from the PAWG and, crucially, a fine-grained understanding of the recommendations, the voting was divided into component parts. These included:

- 1) Internal Trail System
- 2) Trail Connections with Surrounding Town Trails and Pathways
- 3) Opportunities for Regional Trail Connections
- 4) Proposed Trail Uses
- 5) Concept Parking Designs

All the data previously reviewed during the process was synthesized into the voting. Throughout the twelve-month period, PAWG members had time to study the issues, raise potential concerns, learn from subject experts, discuss amongst themselves, and hear comments from the public. Along the way, Midpen provided additional analysis when requested by the PAWG and advanced ideas provided by PAWG members.

The primary concerns raised were related to traffic safety, natural resources protection, viewshed and aesthetics, and trail connections. Striking a balance between these trade-offs can be challenging. Throughout the voting process, both individually and as a group, PAWG members sought the best solution given the constraints and site considerations. On some topics they put forward multiple recommendations to the PNR (Appendices B & C).

Voting was guided by the previously reviewed Gradients of Agreement. This approach tests the level of agreement on a proposal that expands on the traditional “yes” or “no” voting. For the list of Gradients of Agreement, see Section 2(e) that discusses the Decision Making Process.

B. Voting Results

Voting results were tabulated during the meeting (Appendix B). The process provided a concise result supporting specific recommendations as well as additional data related to the level of support (i.e., more “1” votes than “3” or “4” votes) and who supported each recommendation. Overall, the PAWG supported opening the Hawthorns Area to a broad range of public access uses. Notably, many topics received unanimous votes, demonstrating a strong accord among the PAWG members.

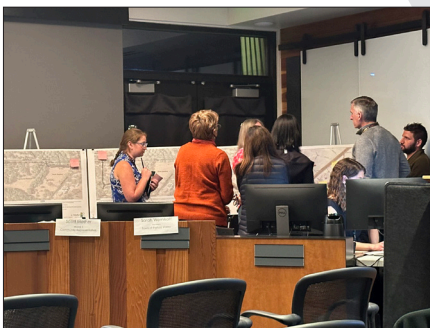


Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

The following lists a summary of the vote by topic.

1) Internal Trail System

Voting by the PAWG first addressed each segment of the internal trail system.

Vote summary:

- Support for all internal loop trail segments and spurs to vista points (trail segments 2 through 9, plus 11 and 12).
- Support for bench locations A, B, and C.
- Suggestion to limit visibility of one trail segment from other trail segments as far as topographically feasible.

Considerations to be shared with the PNR:

- As far as grading will permit, Trail Segments #3 and #4 should be aligned to have enough separation from each other, from the edge of the property closest to Sweet Springs Trail, and from the homes nearby.
- Adjust the trail alignment as needed to accommodate the ultimately selected staging area.

2) Trail Connections with Surrounding Town Trails and Pathways

Vote summary:

- Support for connections to Alpine Trail (trail segments 1, 10 and 14)
- Opposition to connection to Sweet Springs Trail by Saddleback Drive (trail segment 15)
- Suggestion to re-evaluate and decide whether to build connector trail to Sweet Springs Trail after monitoring trail usage following the preserve's opening (trail segments 16 and 17)

Considerations to be shared with the PNR:

- When the conceptual trail alignments are further refined, the PAWG discussed that they be adjusted to minimize impacts on residents of Portola Valley Ranch. Specifically, they could increase the distance between trails and houses. The intent is to meet Midpen's Good Neighbor Policy as far as practicable while providing public access.
- There was a desire to move any connection to Sweet Springs Trail further northwest and away from Pomponio Court that currently connects to Sweet Springs Trail.

3) Opportunities For Regional Trail Connections

Vote summary:

- Support for a future connection between the Los Trancos Trail on Los Trancos Road through the Hawthorns property to Valley Oak Street.
- Support the concept of a future regional connection to Arastradero Preserve (over Los Trancos Creek) and to Foothills Nature Preserve.
- Suggestion to collaboratively seek possible future regional trail connections over land owned by others immediately adjacent to Hawthorns.

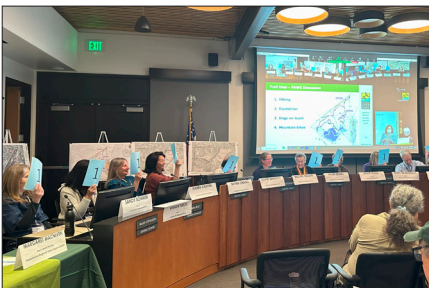


Photo Credit: Nataly Jolly

Considerations to be shared with the PNR:

- The PAWG specifically discussed creating and supporting the larger vision of these regional connections while being cognizant that they require access over land that Midpen does not own or control. They acknowledged that these possible future connections will require Town involvement and partnerships with other landowners, but nevertheless wanted to voice and convey their support for any such efforts to the PNR and the Board. The request included adding text to the plan graphics showing the desired regional connections.

4) Proposed Trail Uses

Vote summary:

- Support for a multi-use access on the internal loop trail, spur trails, and connections to Alpine Trail (trail segments 1 through and including 14). The uses included: hikers, equestrians, dogs on leash, and bicyclists.
- Support for use by hikers, equestrians, and dogs on leash on one or more of trail segments 15, 16, and 17 if they are implemented.
- Opposition to use by bicyclists on trail segments 15, 16, and 17.
- Consideration to be shared with PNR: Allowing bicycle use on the Alpine Trail segments that connect to the proposed connector trails (segments 10 and 14) would require approval from the Town of Portola Valley.

5) Concept Parking Design

Since the first PAWG meeting, a considerable amount of work went into iterating and devising the possible parking area options. The PAWG helped develop and review ten options with Options 7, 8, 9, and 10 being short-listed for voting. Options 7 and 8 were selected during the informal voting at PAWG Meeting #5. Option 9 grew directly out of comments received from PAWG members. Option 10 also built upon PAWG input and was developed between PAWG meetings #6 and #7. Both Options 9 and 10 keep the parking area around the perimeter of the preserve along Alpine Road.

In preparation for their last meeting, PAWG members had individually assessed Options 7 through 10 using criteria per the Board-approved visions and goals for the project (Appendix C). Their assessments were compiled and prior to formally voting, the PAWG reviewed a summary of their collective input (*Hawthorns Area Public Access Working Group Midpen Assessment of Conceptual Parking Design Options*).

Vote summary:

- Support for both Parking Options 9 and 10, with Option 10 being preferred. Support for a maximum of 50 parking spaces.
- Support for consideration of a phased approach.
- Opposition to Parking Options 7 and 8.



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

C. Additional Considerations for the PNR Committee

PAWG comments to supplement the vote and recommendations:

- Until the ultimate number of parking spaces is decided, some uncertainty about the level of use of the Hawthorns Area will likely remain. If it has capacity, the parking area may support regional connectivity, offer staging for road cycling, and host those visiting nearby preserves, as well as those visiting the Hawthorns Area. The parking analysis prepared by Parametrix recommended 25 to 68 parking spaces for a preserve of this size. The PAWG felt that 50 parking spaces was a reasonable upper limit and suggested that further information about the level of use may lead to reducing the total number of parking spaces. The PAWG understood that it is the purview of the PNR to decide the appropriate number of parking spaces at Hawthorns.
- The Town may have concerns about possible conflicts with the movement of school-aged children in relation to the driveway location in Option 10.
- There was a request to specifically provide bike parking within the parking area.



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac



Photo Credit: Jared Hart

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Photo Credit: Galli Basson

6. Conclusion

The PAWG worked diligently and respectfully to fulfill its charge. There was a great deal of information provided, considered, and generated through the twelve-month process, and ultimately this group, representing both the community of Portola Valley and the broad constituency of Midpen, came to a strategic and thoughtful approach for providing public access to the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Preserve.

The PAWG's recommendations will be reviewed by Midpen's Planning and Natural Resources Committee. The Board will make the final policy decisions on which concept parking and trail alternatives to incorporate into the Hawthorns Area Plan and future environmental review phase.



Photo Credit: Tina Hugg



Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

7. Appendices

A. Concept Parking Design Summary Report

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

B. PAWG Meeting #7 Voting Results

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

C. Site Assessment Summaries and Forms

1. Summary of PAWG Assessment of Conceptual Parking Design Options
2. PAWG Individual Assessments

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

D. General Information

1. PAWG Procedural Guide and Ground Rules
2. PAWG Member Biographies

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

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Photo Credit: Midpen staff

APPENDIX A

Concept Parking Design Summary Report

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

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Photo Credit: Midpen staff

APPENDIX B

B. PAWG Meeting #7 Voting Results

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

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Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

APPENDIX C

C. Site Assessment Summaries and Forms

1. Summary of PAWG Assessment of Conceptual Parking Design Options
2. PAWG Individual Assessments

Note: Appendix Included as Board Report Attachment

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Photo Credit: Ashley Mac

APPENDIX D

D. General Information

1. PAWG Procedural Guide and Ground Rules
2. PAWG Member Biographies

Note: Appendix Included in PAWG Meeting 1 packet material in Midpen Archive Portal

<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=22251&repo=r-5197d798>

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