

**TO:** PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

**FROM:** DAREN ANDERSON

**DEPARTMENT:** COMMUNITY SERVICES

**DATE:** JUNE 22, 2021

**SUBJECT:** ASSIGN A COMMISSION LIAISON TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PUBLIC PLANNING PROCESS FOR MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT HAWTHORNS AREA OF WINDY HILL OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) assign a Commission liaison to participate in the public planning process for Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve.

**BACKGROUND**

The 79-acre Hawthorns Area is located near the intersection of Alpine Road and Portola Road, and is one of the last remaining islands of open space in the Town. The property is bounded by Alpine Road to the west, Los Trancos Road to the east, and private property to the north and south. The property is accessible from two driveways on Alpine Road and Los Trancos Road. Improvements to the Hawthorns Area include residential structures, farm buildings, landscaping, and ranch roads.



The Hawthorns Area is subject to a conservation easement granted in 2005 by the Woods Family Trust to the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). The conservation easement allows low intensity recreational uses and related development that aligns with improvements typically offered on other District preserves, such as unimproved trails, split rail fences, parking areas, and directional signage. Other forms of development are generally restricted by the conservation easement. Because POST holds the conservation easement, their participation throughout the planning process will be key in ensuring consistency with the terms stipulated in the conservation easement.

### Preliminary Use and Management Plan

At the time of property acquisition, the District prepared a Preliminary Use and Management Plan (PUMP) to establish land management activities. The PUMP included a future action to study the feasibility of providing public access and connecting to existing trail networks. The first step in preparing a long-term use and management plan for the property, including a plan for public access, is to develop the vision and goals for the property for the District Board's consideration and adoption; the vision and goals would guide all future planning efforts and be developed as part of this first phase of Plan development.

### Vision Plan

In 2014, the District Board approved 54 priority actions in the Open Space Vision Plan that prioritized conservation and management efforts throughout the District's jurisdiction; the Hawthorns Area is included under Vision Plan Priority #6: Windy Hill, which states the following actions that are specific to the Hawthorns Area: "Open Hawthorns Area, develop trails connecting to Portola Valley and Palo Alto trails. Explore partnerships to protect, restore, and interpret historic buildings. Improve habitat conditions in Los Trancos Creek." The public supported this Vision Plan priority in 2014 when it voted for the passage of Measure AA, a \$300M general obligation bond to fund the top 25 Vision Plan Priority Actions. The total expenditure plan for the Windy Hill Measure AA Portfolio is \$12,740,000 of which approximately \$1.7 million can be allocated to the Hawthorns Area.

The Hawthorns Area Plan (Plan) would provide a comprehensive plan for the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve (Hawthorns Area), located in the Town of Portola Valley (Town) and owned and managed by the District. This comprehensive use and management plan would prescribe future uses and management activities at the Hawthorns Area. The proposed planning process for this effort involves multiple phases to engage the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR), full Board of Directors (Board), and broad community, beginning with the development of vision and goals for the entire Hawthorns Area.

The District is proposing to hold a series of PNR meetings with multiple opportunities for early public comment during the first phase of the planning process. PNR meetings would lead to drafting the Hawthorns Area vision and goals for consideration by the Board. The public will have opportunity to comment at all PNR and Board meetings and via a virtual comment card currently available on the project website at <https://www.openspace.org/ourwork/projects/hawthorns-public-access>.

District staff is exploring the potential formation of a working group to provide another venue for

public input. The working group would engage perspectives, interests, and values that reflect the full range of District's regional constituency, including local neighbors, environmental organizations, and user groups. The planning process would culminate in the development of a conceptual plan that the Board would consider approving as the project description to initiate California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review and Town permitting. As part of the planning process, the District would also prepare a comprehensive use and management plan to prescribe future uses and management activities at the Hawthorns Area.

More information about the planning process and the Hawthorns Area can be found on the District staff report:

[https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/20210518\\_HawthornsPublicAccessPlan\\_R-21-65.pdf](https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/20210518_HawthornsPublicAccessPlan_R-21-65.pdf)

### **DISCUSSION**

The Hawthorns Area is about ¼ mile from Foothills Nature Preserve and about a ½ a mile from Pearson Arastradero Preserve.

The Hawthorns Area planning process may include regional trail connections with other nearby public open spaces, including the Pearson-Arastradero Preserve, Foothills Park, Coal Mine Ridge Nature Preserve, and the Stanford Dish Area.

### **TIMELINE**

The District plans to have PNP Meetings in the Summer and Fall 2021 and early 2022.

Tentative schedule for developing the Plan.

- Vision and Goals (PNR Committee and Board) 2021-2022
- Conceptual plan development and review (District Committee and Board; Town Commissions/Committees) 2022-2024
- CEQA review 2024-2025
- Project approval and permitting 2025