

**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

DATE: May 22, 2019

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Staff

SUBJECT: Consideration of a request by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD) to determine if acquisition of a 190-acre parcel (APN 078-190-030) located east of La Honda Road (State Highway 84) and one mile north of the unincorporated town of La Honda, for use as open space, natural resource management and public trail/low intensity recreation conforms to the County General Plan.

County File Number: PLN 2019-00157

PROPOSAL

Pursuant to Government Code Section 65402(c), the applicant seeks a determination of whether its proposed acquisition of a privately-owned 190-acres parcel (APN 078-190-030) located a mile north of the unincorporated town of La Honda, conforms to the County General Plan. The parcel is intended to be added to MROSD's La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve, and used for open space, natural resource management, habitat preservation, and low intensity recreation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission find and report that MROSD's proposed acquisition of APN 078-190-030 for use for open space, natural resource management, and low intensity recreation conforms to the County General Plan.

BACKGROUND

Report Prepared By: James A. Castañeda, AICP, 650/363-1853

Applicant: Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Owner: Woodruff Redwoods Property

Location: East of La Honda Road (State Highway 84), one mile north of the unincorporated town of La Honda, and approximately 2.5 miles south of Skyline Boulevard (State Highway 35).

APN: 078-190-030

Size: 190 acres

Existing Zoning: Resource Management

General Plan Designation: Open Space

Sphere-of-Influence: N/A

Existing Land Use: Unimproved forest cover

Water Supply: None

Sewage Disposal: None

Flood Zone: Zone X, Area of Minimal Flooding

Environmental Evaluation: The determination that the proposed acquisition of property conforms to the County General Plan is exempt from environmental review under the “common sense exemption” that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. (CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3).). Any future development proposed on the property would need to address relevant CEQA requirements.

Setting: The property is densely wooded with mixed hardwood forest including redwood and Douglas-fir with areas of coastal scrub and grasslands. There is a network of overgrown roads on the property, which were used for limited cattle grazing in the 1950s and 1960s and historically as logging roads.

DISCUSSION

A. KEY ISSUES

1. Basis for Acquisition

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District provides the following description of the property and proposed acquisition, from MROSD’s property fact sheet:

Land Use: The 190-acre property is vacant and unimproved. Access to the property is via an unimproved road, which travels through an adjacent private property along Highway 84. The property is also accessed, on a permissive basis, on unpaved private roads from the end of Rapley Ranch Road via Highway 35. The Woodruff Redwoods

Property abuts the Audubon Society property on a portion of its northern boundary and is surrounded by other large rural residential parcels.

Landscape: The terrain on the property is generally north facing and moderately steep ranging from 600 feet at its western boundary near Highway 84, and 1,200 feet along its eastern boundary. Woodruff Creek, a perennial stream, runs along the northern boundary, and a seasonal tributary traverses the southwestern portion of the property. The property is densely wooded with mixed hardwood forest including redwood and Douglas-fir with areas of coastal scrub and grasslands. There is a network of overgrown roads on the property, which were used for limited cattle grazing in the 1950s and 1960s and as historic logging roads.

Flora and Fauna: Old growth redwoods, young growth redwoods and Douglas fir cover about 51 acres of the Woodruff Redwoods Property. The understory consists of young trees, sword ferns, and redwood sorrel. Shrubs and grasses associated with coastal forest communities fill small clearings. The woodland provides habitat for animal species associated with the upper elevations of the San Gregorio Creek watershed, including deer, coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions. A wide variety of small mammals, birds, and other species occupy or migrate through the general area.

Hydrology: The property drains to La Honda Creek, a tributary in the upper San Gregorio Creek watershed. The property forms part of the watershed's headwaters that support spawning habitat for the endangered Coho salmon and threatened steelhead trout. Surface flow eventually travels to San Gregorio Creek, listed under the federal Clean Water Act as an impaired water body for sediment, before it discharges into the ocean. There is a pond located on the northeastern portion of the property.

The property is currently privately- owned, and is intended after acquisition to be added to MROSD's La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve for use as open space, natural resource management, and low intensity recreation.

2. Reason for General Plan Conformity Determination

Per California Government Code Section 65402, prior to any acquisition of property for a public purpose, the acquiring agency must request that the planning agency with jurisdiction determine whether the acquisition is consistent with the adopted General Plan.

3. Conformance with the San Mateo County General Plan

The proposed acquisition potentially involves the following General Plan policies, which are addressed herein.

a. Vegetative, Water, Fish and Wildlife Resources Policies

- (1) Policy 1.22.a of the County General Plan requires that the County regulate land uses and development activities to prevent and, if infeasible, mitigate to the extent possible, significant adverse impacts on vegetative, water, fish and wildlife resources.
- (2) Policy 1.23 requires the County to regulate the location, density and design of development to minimize significant adverse impacts and encourage enhancement of vegetative, water, fish and wildlife resources.
- (3) Policy 1.24 requires that the County ensure that development will (1) minimize the removal of vegetative resources; and/or (2) protect vegetation which enhances microclimate, stabilizes slopes or reduces surface water runoff, erosion or sedimentation; and/or (3) protect historic and scenic trees.
- (4) Policy 1.27 requires that the County regulate land uses and development activities within and adjacent to sensitive habitats, and permit only land uses and development activities that are consistent with protection of sensitive habitats, including such uses as fish and wildlife management, trails and scenic overlook, and minimally necessary public service and private infrastructure.

Discussion: The subject property is densely wooded and undeveloped but contains evidence of historical timber harvest activities. The property contains vegetative and wildlife resources, and provides habitat for various flora and fauna native to rural areas. The property may contain protected or sensitive habitats or species.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has not proposed any developments on the property proposed for acquisition, or any changes to the conditions or uses of the property at this time. The proposal is limited to acquisition of the property, and any subsequent changes in use would be determined through a planning process, consistent with applicable County regulations. The acquisition in itself does not conflict with the General Plan's vegetative, water, fish and wildlife resources. In addition, MROSD has indicated its intent to maintain this property for use as open space, natural resource management, habitat preservation, and low intensity recreation. Such future uses are consistent with these General Plan policies. Any future

planning and development of the site would require additional environmental evaluation, and would require such mitigation measures as determined by evaluation.

b. Soil Resources and Visual Quality Policies

- (1) Policy 2.17 calls for the County to regulate development to minimize soil erosion and sedimentation.
- (2) Policy 2.23 calls for the County to regulate excavation, grading, filling and land clearing activities to protect against accelerated soil erosion and sedimentation.
- (3) Policy 4.25.a calls for minimizing grading or earth-moving operations.
- (4) Policy 4.25.b requires blending graded areas with adjacent landforms through the use of contour grading rather than harsh cutting or terracing of the site.

Discussion: The proposed acquisition does not conflict with the General Plan Soil Resources Policies or Visual Quality Policies. Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is not proposing any land disturbance at this time. Any proposed future development would be subject to the County Grading Ordinance, which incorporates measures to minimize soil erosion and sedimentation. In addition, MROSD's intended uses for the property, as described above, are consistent with these General Plan policies.

c. Park and Recreation Resource Policies

- (1) Policy 6.10 generally encourages park providers to locate passive park and recreation facilities in rural areas in order to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive open space lands. This policy considers the following activities to be generally compatible with passive park and recreation facilities: camping, hiking, picnicking, horseback riding and nature study.

Discussion: The subject property is in the County's formally designated rural zone. The property is not currently used for recreation, and is crossed only by overgrown former logging roads. Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has expressed the intent to join the property to the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve located to the north of the subject parcels, for use as open space, natural resource management,

and low intensity recreation. Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's required planning for these uses, as specified in its Service Plan, includes measures entirely consistent with Policy 6.10.

- (2) Policy 6.14 calls for the County to encourage all providers to design sites to accommodate recreation uses that minimize adverse effects on the natural environment and adjoining private ownership.

Discussion: While MROSD has not formulated any specific development proposals, the general intended uses of the acquired property for open space, natural resource management, and low intensity recreation, are entirely consistent with Policy 6.14 of the General Plan.

Acquisition of the parcel is consistent with the County General Plan.

B. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to a finding of conformity would be to find and report that the acquisition does not comply with the County's General Plan.

C. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A request for General Plan Conformity analysis is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and is exempt from environmental evaluation. Any future development proposed on the property would need to address relevant CEQA requirements.

D. REVIEWING AGENCIES

County Counsel

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Recommended Findings
- B. Vicinity Map

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County of San Mateo
Planning and Building Department

RECOMMENDED FINDING

Permit or Project File Number: PLN 2019-00157 Hearing Date: May 22, 2019

Prepared By: James A. Castañeda, AICP For Adoption By: Planning Commission
Project Planner

RECOMMENDED FINDING

1. Find and report that MROSD's proposed acquisition of APN 078-190-030 for use as open space, natural resource management, and low intensity recreation conforms to the General Plan Vegetative, Water, Fish and Wildlife Resources Policies, Soil Resources Policies, Visual Quality Policies, and Park and Recreation Resource Policies, and is consistent with the County's General Plan.

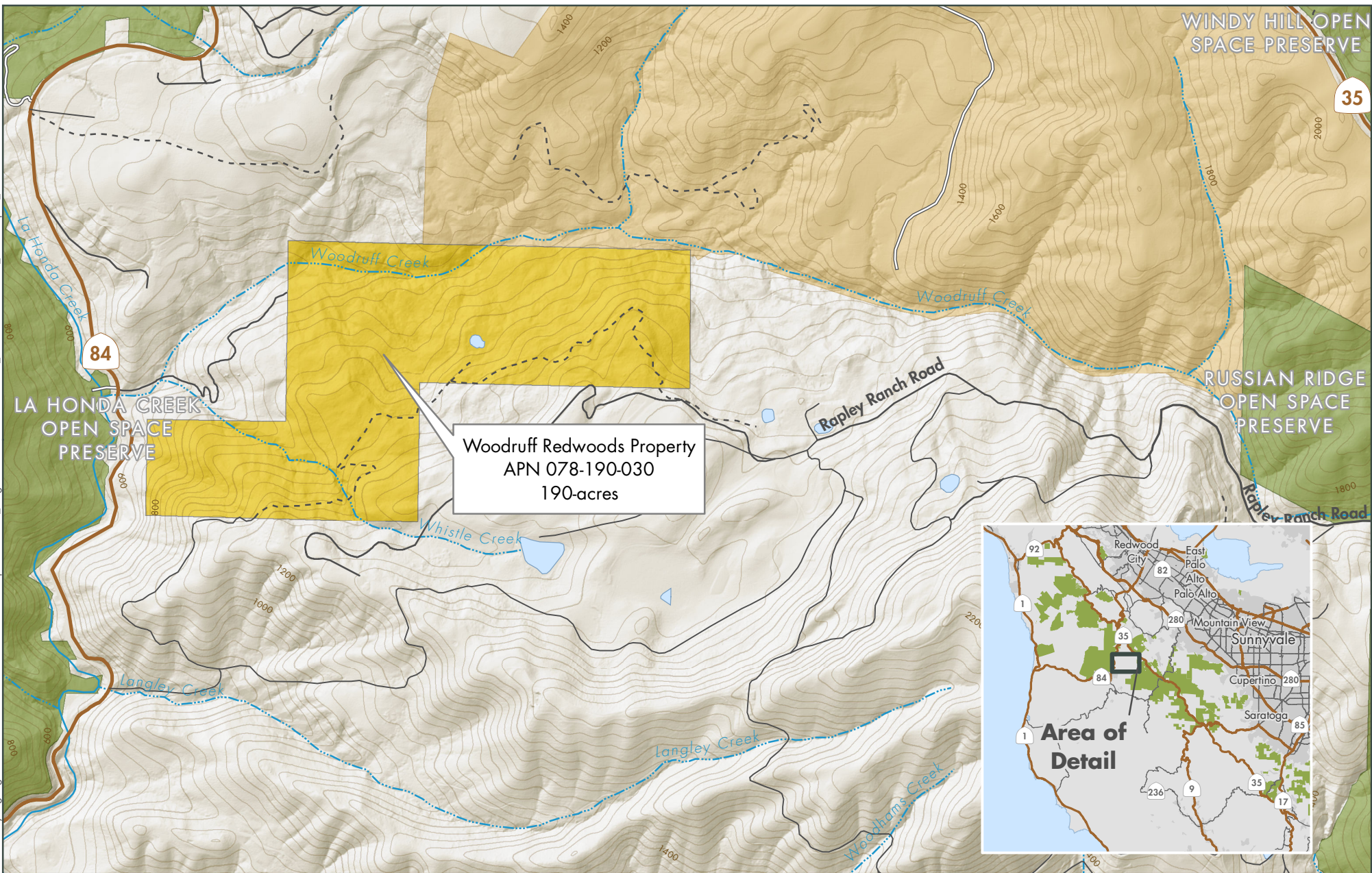
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County of San Mateo - Planning and Building Department

ATTACHMENT B

Path: G:\Projects\Russian_Ridge\WoodruffRedwoods\RR_WoodruffRedwoods_BoardReport_20190424.mxd
Created By: ngreig



Woodruff Redwoods Property

- Midpen Preserves
- Woodruff Redwoods Property
- Audubon Society
- Private Property

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(Midpen)
4/24/2019



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.