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## Citizens' Advisory Committee

Memo-20-12  
Meeting 20-04  
July 27, 2020

To: Citizens' Advisory Committee  
From: Lucas Shellhammer  
Subject: Updates and Feedback Requested for Public Access Improvements at Rancho Cañada del Oro and Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserves.

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### **REVENUE/COST**

#### **Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve Public Access at Llagas Creek**

The projected total construction cost for the project is estimated to be \$900,000. Staff is seeking grant opportunities to cover at least a portion of the costs for this project.

#### **Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve Public Access**

The projected total construction cost for the project is estimated to be \$2,500,000. To date \$800,000 has been secured through grant funding. Staff will continue to seek additional funding opportunities for this project.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve Public Access at Llagas Creek**

In Fiscal Year 2018/2019, a bridge connection over Llagas Creek at Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve, near the existing staging area and Llagas Creek Loop Trail, was identified as a priority capital improvement project. This project would serve to facilitate public and operational access to the 1,858-acre southern portion of the preserve, formerly known as Blair Ranch. Currently, staff is working with a team of consultants to develop a plan for a new accessible interpretative day-use area accessed via a new bridge crossing Llagas Creek to serve hikers, bikers, equestrians, and visitors for educational programming.

To determine project feasibility, site inventories and analyses were conducted between spring and summer of 2019 for biological and cultural resources, hydrology and hydraulics, and geotechnical conditions. The engineering firm, Waterways Consulting, and landscape architecture firm, Restoration Design Group (RDG), have used these studies to develop initial designs for a bridge and day-use area complimenting the existing Llagas Creek Loop Trail and staging area at Casa Loma Road. See Exhibit A, *Project Location and Site Plan*, for general site location and proposed features in relation to the existing staging area.

A public joint Use and Management/Citizens' Advisory Committee Meeting was held on site in April 2018. Members of the Committee and public who attended the meeting found the proposed project to

be in keeping with the intent for access to other areas of the preserve and a desirable addition to the existing staging area and accessible loop trail at Casa Loma Road. A project webpage was created in December 2019 to provide regular project updates to the public. Through the website, there is an opportunity for members of the public to review project information, as well as sign up to receive project updates. An email blast to interested stakeholders and a mailing providing the announcement of the public meetings for this project was provided in advance to allow the public an opportunity to attend the meetings or provide written comments.

Conceptual design alternatives for the Llagas Creek bridge and day-use area were developed and reviewed by an interdepartmental staff and consultant team from January – March 2020. Next steps will be to develop construction documentation and determine permitting and CEQA requirements. Additionally, staff is currently scoping a feasibility study to ascertain the best routing to reach the portion of the preserve formerly known as Blair Ranch while minimizing impacts to natural and cultural resources. Once the bridge and day-use area are completed, visitors will be able to access the southern reaches of the preserve through our self-guided “Open Access Days” program in the short term, with longer term multi-use trail access based on the results of the feasibility study. The schedule for the bridge and day-use area will be based on permitting and CEQA analysis as well as funding and grant awards. Funding for construction is expected in Fiscal Year 2021-2022.

#### **Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve Public Access**

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority) received an award of funding approval from the Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation on November 10, 2014 for \$1,400,000 towards the purchase of the 1,831-acre United Technologies Corporation Coyote Ridge Property, now known as the Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve (Preserve). On June 3, 2015, the Moore Foundation modified the agreement to reallocate the Foundation’s grant to support \$1,000,000 towards acquisition expenses and \$400,000 towards public access improvements. The Authority applied the Moore Foundation’s grant of \$1,000,000 toward the purchase of the 1,831-acre property in October 2015 and has applied the remaining \$400,000 towards the planning and design costs for the public access improvements. In addition, \$400,000 in funding has been secured through the Metropolitan Transit Commission’s Priority Conservation Area (PCA) grant program.

Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve will be a new preserve opened to public access by the Open Space Authority. The preserves’ resources, proximity to San Jose, and connection to Coyote Valley presents a unique opportunity for education and interpretation, equitable public access, wildlife connectivity, and conservation. The preserve will include a parking and gathering area accessible by Malech Road, a sustainable trail network, and a staging area with a restroom, trailhead, and interpretive features and signage. Visitors will be able to climb nearly 1,400 feet in elevation through grasslands up to the ridgeline for sweeping views of Santa Clara Valley and spring wildflower displays. Access to the ridgeline will complete a nearly 3-mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The goals of this project are to protect rare habitat and sensitive species while providing a high-quality experience through our Open Access Weekend events and docent-led programs. A partnership with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council will also provide additional guided access to the preserve.

To determine project feasibility, site inventories and analyses were conducted between spring 2019 through summer of 2020 for biological and cultural resources, and topography. The civil engineering firm, Sandis, and landscape architecture firm, Restoration Design Group (RDG), have used these studies to develop initial designs for a staging area and other public access amenities throughout the preserve

including shaded rest areas. See Exhibit B, *Location and Phase 1 Master Plan*, for site location and proposed phase one public access features.

A meeting of the Use and Management Committee as along with members of the public was held in November 2019 with a presentation followed by a field visit to the Malech Road staging area site. Participants were provided with the project context, background, a summary of the analysis and feasibility studies as well as the conceptual design for the project. Members of the Committee and public who attended the meeting found the proposed project to be keeping with the intent to protect resources while providing public access to this unique landscape. A project webpage was created in August 2019 to provide regular project updates to the public. Through the website, there is an opportunity for members of the public to review project information, as well as sign up to receive project updates. An email blast to interested stakeholders and a mailing providing the announcement of the public meetings for this project was provided in advance to allow the public an opportunity to attend the meetings or provide written comments.

Conceptual design alternatives for the Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve Public Access were developed and reviewed by an interdepartmental staff and consultant team from September 2019 – April 2020. Schematic design was submitted mid-July and is currently being reviewed by staff. Next steps are to begin construction documents, County of Santa Clara permitting, Valley Habitat Agency permitting, and CEQA documentation. Once the staging area is completed, the public will have access to focused areas within the 1,800-acre preserve through the many public facilities included in the design. Construction is anticipated to begin in fall 2021 with public access opening by spring 2022.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Rancho Cañada del Oro Llagas Creek Bridge and Day-Use Area**

The Bridge and Day-Use Area public access project will provide improved public and operational access to the southern portion of Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve. In addition, the design will facilitate the Authority's accessible environmental education programming by providing a series of use areas designed to accommodate groups of varying size. The design incorporates existing natural features and provides additional features such as picnic tables, seating, and interpretive elements. The bridge crossing and meadow day-use area will be designed for accessibility, meeting Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) *Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas*, connecting the existing Llagas Creek Loop Trail (a paved accessible trail) to provide an experience for visitors with a range of abilities. The bridge will also protect stream habitat by eliminating the need to ford the creek.

Staff will provide an update on the project design progress, scope, schedule, and budget including a summary of feedback from the July 23, 2020 Board of Directors meeting. Following the presentation, staff will request feedback and comments from the Citizens' Advisory Committee and members of the public.

### **Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve Public Access**

The Authority's environmental consultants, including Vollmar Natural Lands Consulting, H.T. Harvey & Associates, and Basin Research Associates, have completed the majority of inventory and analysis including biological and cultural resource surveys.

The Authority is currently working with landscape architecture firm, Restoration Design Group (RDG), to provide schematic site design alternatives for public access improvements. Proposed Phase One improvements include a central gathering place for preserve visitors at the Malech Road parking and

staging area, accessible picnic and overlooks, rehabilitation of existing ranch roads and creation of new trails, and development of trail amenities including rest areas and overlooks with integrated educational interpretation. The lower portion of the preserve, adjacent to the Malech Road staging area, will provide accessible trails and amenities meeting Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) *Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas* public access to provide experiences for visitors with a broad range of abilities. Features will integrate well-designed and compact “light on the land” layouts to minimize grading and disturbance to natural resources. Features in this location will also compliment the Authority’s educational programming targeting Deep Engagement Communities identified in the *Understanding Our Community* report through a longer term goal of providing transportation from schools in underserved communities to visit, experience, and learn about the unique resources at the preserve and to experience wild nature within 10 miles of downtown San Jose. Public access features are clustered at Malech Road for two primary reasons including to reduce impacts on the larger preserve habitat and to allow access to a larger group of visitors who may not have constraints to hiking the ridge. The Authority intends to additionally support programming to provide alternative access options to the ridgeline for users of a range of abilities.

Staff will provide an update on the project design progress, scope, schedule, and budget. Following the presentation staff will request feedback and comments from the Citizens’ Advisory Committee and members of the public.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

This item is to provide the Citizens’ Advisory Committee and members of the public with information on the proposed project and to seek feedback from meeting attendees. A presentation will be provided and added to the project website following the meeting.

*Attachment(s):           Exhibit A -- Project Location and Site Plan*  
*Exhibit B -- Project Location and Phase 1 Master Plan*