
R-20-79
Meeting 20-16
August 27, 2020

AGENDA ITEM #3

To: Board of Directors
Open Space Authority

From: Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

SUBJECT

Informational Item: Updates and Feedback on Phase One Public Access Improvements at Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve

REVENUE/COST

The projected total cost for the Phase One project (environmental review, design, engineering, permitting and construction) is estimated to be \$4,000,000. To date \$800,000 has been secured through grant funding. Staff will continue to seek additional funding opportunities for this project.

BACKGROUND

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 Transportation Commission's Priority Conservation Area (PCA) grant program.

Coyote Ridge will be a new preserve, proposed to be opened to public access by the Authority using voter-approved Measure Q funds and public and private grant funds. The preserves' resources, proximity to San Jose and Highway 101, and connection to Coyote Valley presents a unique opportunity for education and interpretation, equitable public access, wildlife connectivity, and conservation. The preserve is located just south of San Jose at the Bailey Avenue exit off Highway 101. The proposed amenities 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 up to the ridgeline for sweeping views of Santa Clara Valley and spring wildflower displays. Proposed access to the ridgeline would 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 including our Open Access Weekend events and docent-led programs. A partnership with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council would provide additional guided access to the preserve. Guided and self-guided access would be permitted at the preserve upon the completion of Phase 1 improvements described herein.

To determine project feasibility and for the preparation of environmental review, 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 proposed staging area and other public access amenities throughout the preserve including trail re-alignment and shaded rest areas. See Exhibit D. *Location and Phase 1 Plan*, for proposed site location and proposed phase 1 public access features.

A meeting of the Use and Management Committee of the Board of Directors was held on October 2017 to review the initial ideas and proposed locations for public access improvements including early program concepts at the Malech Road site and beyond. Proposed amenities in keep with the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency (Habitat Agency) easement terms. A follow-up joint meeting of the Use and Management Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) as well as members of the public took place in November 2019. The meeting included a presentation followed by a field visit to the proposed Malech Road staging area site. Participants were provided with the proposed project context, background, a summary of the analysis and feasibility studies as well as the conceptual design for the project. Members of the Use and Management Committee and public who attended the meeting found the proposed project to be in keeping with the Authority's mission to protect sensitive natural resources while providing compatible 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 and provide comments as well as sign up to receive project updates. An email notification and mailing to interested stakeholders provided and announcement of this public meeting in advance to allow the public an opportunity to attend or provide written comments.

In July 2020, a meeting of the Citizen's Advisory Committee was held. Staff provided project updates on Preserve programming, design, budget, and schedule. Staff fielded questions and comments from the Committee and members of the public regarding the design and considerations to the preserve's unique site and resource considerations. The consensus of the Committee and members of the public was in support of the project.

Conceptual design alternatives for the Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve Public Access project 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 prepare environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), construction documentation, and pursue County of Santa Clara and Habitat Agency permitting. Recently, we have confirmed the process for attaining the Habitat Agency permit, including eliminating the estimated \$500,000 in Authority permit fees for serpentine disturbance at Malech Road to zero fees through a land-in-lieu conservation easement over serpentine lands at our Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve. If the proposed staging area is completed, the public would have access to areas within the 1,800-acre preserve through focused public facilities included in the design. Construction is anticipated to begin in fall/winter 2021 with public access opening by spring 2022.

DISCUSSION

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 for Malech Road and the larger preserve, as required

for Habitat Agency permitting and CEQA review, and to ensure that proposed features minimize or reduce impacts to sensitive resources.

The Authority is currently working with 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, 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, is proposed to provide accessible trails and amenities meeting Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) *Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas*. This would provide experiences for visitors with a broad range of abilities. Features are proposed to integrate well-designed and compact “light on the land” layouts to minimize grading and disturbance to natural resources. Features in this location would 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 would be clustered at Malech Road for two primary reasons: to reduce impacts on the larger preserve habitat and to allow access to larger groups of visitors and those who may have constraints hiking to the ridge. The Authority intends to additionally support programming to provide proposed alternative access options to the ridgeline for users with a range of abilities.

Staff will provide an update on the project design process, visitor experience and site character, schedule, permitting and budget. Following the presentation, staff will request feedback and comments from the Board of Directors and members of the public.

RECOMMENDATION

Provide the Board of Directors 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.

Prepared by:
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Attachment(s): Exhibit D -- Project Location and Phase 1 Plan