

CONSERVATION MINUTES 2019 9-24

Present: Chiariello, DeStaebler, Eckstrom, Heiple, Magill, Murphy, Plunder, Stromeyer,
Also Present: John Richards, Council representative; residents Betsy Morgenthaler, Diana Fischer, Danna Breen, Mary Hufty, Randy True, Gary Morgenthaler, Caroline Verlongen, Angela Hey
Absent: Walz

SEPTEMBER DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order 7:30
2. Oral Communications –
 - a. Breen deplors the extent to which Dittrichia is spreading through town. She has repeatedly implored Public Works to mow it at Ford Field. It is very flammable. Cal Trans has major responsibility for spreading; she has written to them and has set up a meeting with our Assemblyman Jerry Hill to bring it to his attention. She hopes ASCC will begin requiring 5 year performance bonds to insure that Dittrichia is properly eradicated after construction. She suggests that CC recommend stump grinding of all removed Eucalyptus and Acacia. She reminds us that the community easily raised \$112,000 for maintenance of the Frog Pond Park property if the Town will formalize it as Open Space; she suggests there be further fundraising for the needed restoration of Frog Pond itself.
 - b. True reminds us that big changes are coming regarding housing mandates from the states. He believes the new law SB30 prohibiting the establishment of new parks and Open Spaces to avoid building housing does apply to PV despite our small size because we are in the greater urban area. He is concerned that the Town has not at a high level answered the question of why they are considering putting housing on parkland. He believes the \$3.4M in lieu housing fund could efficiently produce much more housing if it were applied to supporting dense housing in a nearby town along transportation corridor.
 - c. Hufty requests that we agendize Stanford Wedge. (already on this agenda)
 - d. Enea communicates her grave concerns about the safety of development at the Wedge. (See details under New Business)
 - e. G. Morgenthaler reminds us that politics is always a competition between competing values and interests and requests that we are aggressive in protecting conservation values.
3. *Minutes approved as written.*
4. Current Site Visits
 - a. 175 Fawn – submitted. This plan set included a sheet (L0.6 vegetation management plan) that is not usually included. It is an excellent mapping of defensible space for the individual buildings. It would be desirable for all plan sets to include this.
 - b. 96 Hillbrook underway
 - c. Golden Oaks plan revision underway
 - d. Subcommittee on Guidelines revision nothing new
5. Tree Permits – not a formal permit, but an inquiry about a tree removal in a staff review for an ADU on Bear Gulch. Single live oak directly in the middle of building pad, on a lot with many other trees – no objections.
6. Old Business
 - a. Oversight of Significant Town Owned Open Space properties – 5 year plan for each and detailed calendar of care needed. Boilerplate will be distributed – see Appendix A
 - i. Springdown Preserve - Chiariello, Plunder, Murphy
 - a. Unfortunately the last mowing did not include the area in the NE corner where a multitude of thistles have now gone to seed. This greatly impairs our efforts to remove them from the meadow to encourage the return of wildflowers.
 - b. The central area of the property is looking very good and had a nice display of poppies that could have been

better if the fine timing of the mowing schedule had been followed.

- c. Management Plan – nothing additional needed next month.
 - d. Pond tree has been removed.
 - e. Work on new path and fence opening has begun by hand.
- ii. Frog Pond – Eckstrom, Heiple, Murphy
1. Scout work project sponsor; *dates of 10/6 (Chiariello) and 10/12 (Murphy) chosen. If interest is high and they remain enthusiastic, either 11/9 or 10 could also be scheduled (Murphy)*
 2. 5 year plan; work soon on this plan
 3. Adjacent parcel report. Much input from the public urging us to move to protect this property. We examined the excellent map prepared by Open Space Committee. There are compelling reasons to urge the Council to permanently protect this corridor – to formalize what effectively exists now but is at risk of being lost: A core value of the Town is preservation and protection of open space, most open space acquisition is very expensive and this area is already Town owned (it's a freebie!), a current priority of the Council is climate change and this protects substantial tree coverage, it is an essential corridor for wildlife between Hawthorns and Windy Hill/Coal Mine Ridge, the vegetation here provides needed habitat and refuge for the wildlife in the more open Frog Pond area, and this area serves as a valuable buffer between the Frog Pond and road traffic. Fischer reminds us that this is an evacuation route – as someone who has had her home insurance cancelled. We hope that if this becomes protected Open Space the vegetation along the scenic corridor/evacuation route can be more appropriately managed – removal of trees to create islands of shade, and avoid power lines, etc. *Unanimously approved request to Town Council: Conservation Committee strongly supports formalizing the Frog Pond-Alpine road corridor as Open Space and combining it with Frog Pond Open Space.* We understand there remain details the Council will have to contend with including appropriate name, mindfulness about the major road running through this. A resident's group has raised \$112,000 from 33 donors to be donated to the Town earmarked for maintenance of this parcel contingent on Town approving its designation as Open Space.
 4. Harding Grass Heroes. A neighborhood group willing to work to improve Frog Pond Open Space has been formed. True has created a Google Group to organize and for communication. Stromeyer is coordinating this effort among Ranch residents. A workday will be planned after the rains have begun, focusing at first on removal of Harding Grass. Heiple is knowledgeable about best practices for eradication of Harding Grass – a focused mowing program to prevent seeding and slow but steady digging up of existing will gradually eliminate it over several years. For tree/shrub work a great deal of progress could be made much more efficiently by experienced volunteers using chain saws. Currently work parties are not allowed to do this for liability reasons. Murphy has asked Dennis to find a way to accomplish this. He will speak with Town attorney and get back to us.
 5. The success of fundraising for the parcel requested to be formalized as Open Space inspires Breen to do more concerted fundraising for restoration of Frog Pond Open Space.
- iii. Ford Field – deStaebler, Magill, Walz. *The Dittrichia along the road to the bridge should be urgently removed before it seeds.* It is not clear why it was not mowed when the field was mowed (are there ROW issues around the easement?) Few Italian Thistle now thanks to the good weed

control near the field. The Harding grass unfortunately was allowed to go to seed before it was mowed and we will have more to contend with next year.

- iv. Town Center – Chiariello, Magill, Murphy
 - 1. ASCC approved the revised plan for screening tennis courts – this planting plan will be provided to Young.
 - 2. Detailed planting plan for fall will be provided to Young by early October.
- v. Rossotti's Field and ROW - deStaebler, Magill, Walz. Pines have been removed; invasive privets remain.
- vi. Triangle Park – Eckstrom, Heiple, Murphy
 - 1. None of the proposed work has been done. Enea has on her staff a Fuels Management person who could help with this work. Dan Dempsey is available to the Town on Thursdays and Fridays. He can use Fire Department equipment including the chipper. *Murphy will speak with Young about using Dempsey to get this project moving.*
 - 2. Triangle Park despite being designed, maintained and heavily used as a park is officially still a road remnant. *Unanimously approved a request to Town Council that Triangle Park be formally designated and protected as a Town Park.*
- b. Label trees Town Center and Spring Down – Plunder, Walz will do in November
- c. Intermediate Properties analysis and recommendations.
 - i. #26 Blue Oaks/Los Trancos Neighborhood pond. Murphy, Walz defer
 - ii. #32 Dengler. Heiple, Magill - submitted
 - iii. #33 Shady Trail parklet. Chiariello, Plunder
 - 1. This is an ideal area for a demonstration project to show property owners along the trail what appropriate fire mitigation work should look like. Too many residents are totally eradicating everything except trees, destroying valuable habitat, increasing the risk of erosion and laying the land open to the invasion of more flammable weeds. *Subcommittee will work with neighbors and Enea to accomplish this.*
 - 2. Hufty reports the presence of a much overgrown seep/ephemeral spring. We would like to see removal of overgrowth around this and some shallow excavation to see if a water source for wildlife might be developed. *Above working group will include this in their to do wish list.*
- d. Tip of Month – Magill – Dittrichia!!
- e. What's blooming now – Magill - Tarweed
- f. Kudos of the Month – Plunder – Dittrichia removers.
- g. BYH deStaebler – nothing new
- h. Vegetation management
 - i. Denise Enea is here and was included in the discussion of several items.
 - ii. Ad Hoc committee on Fire Safety – Plunder. At the request of Vegetation Management subcommittee of Ad Hoc Fire Safety Committee and Enea, Murphy and Plunder drafted a letter to the Town Council with a request that it be sent from the Council to MROSD to encourage them to move with more alacrity on fire prevention work. *The wording of the letter was unanimously approved – see Appendix B. Plunder will present to Council.*
- i. Committee/Town cooperation
 - i. Public Works – Murphy will meet with Young to discuss this meeting's recommendations.
 - ii. Sustainability and Environmental Resources Committee – Murphy reports work being done on Reach Codes for the Town. The new building codes coming into effect January 2020 include some of our previous reach code items because PV has been in the vanguard. The PV Water Wise Garden Tour (that we co-sponsor) planned for spring 2020 will be delayed until 2021 at deGarmeau's request because next spring is PV turn to host Earth Day. Perhaps if the help for committees Council is considering materializes, we could do this, but planning would

- need to start soon.
- iii. Trails – Stromeier shared final signage for Coal Mine Ridge Preserve created by PVR recently approved by Council.
 - iv. Open space – Chiariello reported that Open Space Committee unanimously approved a request to the Council that the Frog Pond park/corridor be formally designated as Open Space. They also reaffirmed their opinion from 2017 that Open Space Acquisition fund should be reserved for acquisition and initial restoration of newly acquired properties, and maintenance should be funded by the General Fund.
7. Changes Criteria and web site – all in process
 - a. Protect “Heritage” shrubs – Magill
 - b. Change Heritage Tree criteria for Bay trees – Walz
 - c. Golden Oaks – Magill, Walz
 8. Rodenticide turn in event – Plunder, Chiariello – will be publicized at our Puma talk.
 9. Fall Evening lecture Pumas - Plunder, Chiariello
 - a. 10/15/19 7pm Community Hall
 - b. Flyer approved
 - c. We must set up – assignments made for set up and tear down and refreshments.
 10. New Business
 - a. Stanford Wedge development
 - i. The procedure to be followed for approval of this project was reviewed because it is different than the usual process. It has additional step of a Town Subdivision Committee to be convened both early and late in the process.
 - ii. Subcommittee of Heiple, Murphy, Plunder and Stromeier will shepherd this project for CC. Murphy will be liaison with Subdivision Committee. Our first report is requested by 10/7. Jointly with Trails representative we will meet next week with Stanford representative for a site visit.
 - iii. Hufty requests that we seriously consider
 1. Requiring an in perpetuity Open Space easement for the property outside of the developed 6 acres.
 2. Insure that Trails are specified and roughed in and permanent easements granted before approval of project. 2 entrances - 1 at each end of the Alpine Road frontage should be included. 2 trails running N/S as on old general plan map should be included.
 3. A creek shows on an old map – is it in a culvert now? Do construction plans accommodate this? Ideally this creek would be day lighted and the trail/wildlife corridor would accompany it along the NW fence line. This would require moving the entire project south a bit.
 4. Fire is a grave concern in this densely overgrown, difficult to access steep hillside.
 - iv. Enea has serious concerns about fire safety of this development.
 1. The site is treacherous and very difficult to access for fire maintenance. It is steep, south facing and densely vegetated.
 2. The units are clustered so there is no possibility of defensible space between them.
 3. The most advanced building hardening materials and practices should be required because of the heightened risk of this site.
 4. A permanent Fire Maintenance Plan should be required.
 11. Adjournment 10:30
 12. Next Meeting 11//2019, 7:30pm

APPENDIX A

DRAFT BOILERPLATE 5 YEAR PLAN FOR ALL SIGNIFICANT PROPERTIES

NAME OF PROPERTY

1. ANNUAL
 - a. Basic maintenance –
 - i. Weed and invasive control,
 - ii. Removal of dead/hazardous materials.
 - iii. Water as needed; irrigation system maintenance
 - iv. Observation of tree canopy for needed work.
 - v.
2. EVERY OTHER YEAR
3. 2020
4. 2021
5. 2022
6. 2023
7. 2024

APPENDIX B

DRAFT: TC letter to MROSD
From: TC PV
To: MROSD BOD

Recent devastating California wildfires have generated increased awareness of the risks and the need for immediate wildfire prevention reform. It is widely acknowledged that unmanaged vegetation increases fire intensity and its speed of spread.

The Town of Portola Valley and its Conservation Committee support working collaboratively with MROSD's recent initiative in wildfire risk reduction. The Town of PV has a major priority to become as wildfire resilient as possible and appreciates MROSD's 2019-20 strategic plan that includes working with local fire agencies and communities on fire risk reduction.

MROSD is responsible for two open space preserves in Portola Valley; Hawthorns and Windy Hill Preserve which are located in high fire risk zones. Since homes border these preserves there is an urgent need for fuel reduction programs; grazing could possibly be reintroduced in some areas. The decades long unchecked spread of highly flammable coyote brush on Windy Hill is of concern.

Unrestricted vegetation growth, particularly near the powerlines traversing Windy Hill requires more active vegetation management. Grasslands need to be restored to prevent the destructive succession from meadow and grassland to dense flammable shrubs.

The Town of Portola Valley shares the Woodside Fire Protection District concerns of the existence of extensive dead vegetation and ladder fuel in the preserves, especially adjacent to homes and critical infrastructure. We encourage MROSD to upgrade maintenance protocols for downed and dead vegetation urgently, especially near roadways, power lines and accessible trails.

The Town of Portola Valley requests that a representative from the Town of PV be a part of the interdisciplinary team that MROSD has developed to address fire risk.

Town Council and Conservation Committee look forward to working with MROSD in reducing the wildfire risk in our open space lands that MROSD is committed to steward for the residents of San Mateo County. By increasing reduction of hazardous fuels and expanding the restoration of forest, meadow and grassland in MROSD preserves, Open Space land is enhanced, and the fire risk is reduced.

Sincerely

PV Mayor on behalf of Council.