



Town of Portola Valley
Nature and Science Committee Special Meeting
Thursday, September 23, 2021 – 5:00 PM

Special Videoconference Meeting via Zoom

VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING AGENDA

Remote Meeting Covid-19 Advisory: On March 17, 2020, the Governor of California issued Executive Order N- 29-20, suspending certain provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act in order to allow for local legislative bodies to conduct their meetings telephonically or by other electronic means. Pursuant to the statewide Shelter-In-Place Order issued by the Governor in Executive Order N-33-20 on March 19, 2020, and the CDC's social distancing guidelines which discourage large public gatherings, Portola Valley Town Council meetings are being conducted electronically. The meeting is not available for in-person attendance.

Members of the public may attend the meeting by video or phone linked in this agenda.

Join Zoom Video Meeting:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86910335714?pwd=ZHNOZFFsZdkpTcjhYdXF5dzFzMk1TUT09>

Phone into Zoom Meeting:

1-669-900-6833

1-877-853-5247 (toll-free)

*Mute/Unmute – Press *6 / Raise Hand – Press *9*

Meeting ID: 869 1033 5714

Password: 290488

1. Call to Order
2. Oral Communications (Anyone wanting to address the Committee or anyone wanting to speak on an item not on the agenda)
3. Approve Minutes of August 12, 2021, regular meeting
4. Report on August Wildflower talk
5. Planning and discussion:
 - 1) Paul Heiple's talk on Galls on September 20
 - 2) Big Event in January
 - 3) Nature Center plans at Hawthorns
 - 4) Recruiting new members
 - 5) Committee Project leveraging the new fundraiser vehicle
6. Budget Discussion
7. Action Items:
 - 1) Decide big event topic and date
 - 2) Bills to be presented
 - 3) Allocate funds for future events
8. Adjournment:

Next meetings: October 14, 2021, at 5:00 pm on Zoom

Nature and Science Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday August 12, 2021 – 5:00 PM

Special Videoconference Meeting via Zoom

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:12pm.

2. Roll Call:

- Present: Committee members Andrew Browne, Brook Coffee, Bonnie Crater, Pamela Dorrell, Yvonne Tryce and Town Council Liaison Jeff Aalfs.
- Absent: None

3. Oral Communications - None.

4. Approval of July 8, 2021, Meeting Minutes - Unanimously approved.

5. Review July programs: publicity, quality, attendance, status of video (Arctic Ice and Wildflowers)

- July Wildflower program had lower attendance due to the Olympics vacations. 8 people but good reception. We noticed Kari did not have a chance to send out the email notice for this event. Same for Arctic Ice.
- Arctic Ice -- also poorly attended (15). Interesting conversation and folksy. Well received. We would all like better attendance.

6. Upcoming August/September Programs: Wildflowers and Paul Heiple on Galls (Sept 20)

- Galls talk: September 20, 2021 at 7:30pm. Hosted by Pamela and Andy will do the introduction. Bonnie submitted the meeting request and will ask for a promotional paragraph from Paul Heiple.
- Wildflower Talk: August 26th 7:30 - Brook is the host.
- Brooke will ask Kari to promote August and September 20 program. Bonnie sends to Wayside list; Brooke to Woodside Highlands; Yvonne / Pamela to Los Trancos.

7. Discuss in-person climate change event to be scheduled – November or January?

- Yvonne has a description of a program called “Our Watery World” which could be expanded to include climate change topics: Other ideas include:

- Andy - whale bones
- Salt vs. Fresh water topics
- Conservation - such as water faucets selection
- Yvonne will send the outline of "Our Watery World" to Bonnie and will BCC the group. The Committee will discuss the January 2022 event at the next meeting.

8. Discuss updates on Nature Center on Hawthorns by MROSD and what action to take at this time

- Yvonne will send out a copy of the application for the Nature Center for discussion at the next meeting.

9. New Business

- How to recruit new members. Brook suggested that we put out a communication and mention it at our nature talks. Jeff suggested that someone who attended several of the talks might be interested in serving. Star Night (Andrew Pierce) and Flight Night (Rancho San Antonio flight group) are 2 events we might recruit around. All to think about who might be interested in joining the committee in 2022.

9. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:47pm.

TO: Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District Board

FROM: Yvonne Tryce, Chair of Friends of Historic Hawthorn Ranch

Background

The Friends of Hawthorn is composed of residents of Portola Valley and the surrounding area with various interests encompassing nature, history, art, hiking, gardening, and conservation. Their common goal is to increase appreciation for Portola Valley's beautiful natural and historic environment by providing opportunities for residents and visitors to observe and study local natural and cultural history through sharing of local natural history and historic archives, and preservation of local plant, animal, and geologic specimens as well as historic structures. Conservationists want to preserve the creeks and native plants and animals of this lovely valley and thus want to see a use of the property that will meet these aims and educate the public through an interpretive center. As people learn more about our fragile environment, they become better stewards of the land.

Proposed Use of Hawthorn

This proposal is to locate a Nature Center/Interpretive Center on the Hawthorns property which has both natural and historic elements as well as opportunities for community sharing of common interests such as hiking, riding, or art. The structure would be built new and to current code and handicap specifications but would be fashioned after the local historic woodcutter's cottage, utilizing, wherever possible, actual materials from the cottage. In order to have any new construction on the property, it needs to be based on the footprint of a previously existing structure. The Upper Barn is no longer habitable. We believe its area would be about 1,200 square feet, but this measurement will need to be confirmed by MROSD. The option of locating the Nature Center along Alpine Road rather than on the actual footprint of the Upper Barn was suggested at our meeting by your staff, and makes excellent sense. This would allow the Nature Center building to be located near a public restroom maintained by MROSD as part of their development of the site for public use instead of constructing a bathroom inside the Nature Center. It would also put parking close to the building rather than at a distance, making it much more accessible for the handicapped or elderly. In addition, it would be located in an area where non-residential use is already permitted and where access and security would be significantly better. Phone lines would not be needed as we would plan on having volunteers bring cellphones. Water service and electricity, as well as sewer lines or a septic tank, would be required. Gas service would not be required. Our small structure could be warmed by electric heaters.

Management Plan

The management plan is to have the Nature Center managed by the Friends' Steering Committee, which will be responsible for seeing that there is volunteer staff assigned for the hours the nature center is open. Volunteers will be drawn from our existing list of volunteers and new recruits as well as, hopefully, from MROSD-trained volunteers. We would like to have our volunteers be eligible to take your training course. The steering committee will also be responsible for arranging for volunteers to set up and maintain the displays. If it is determined to have live exhibits, volunteers would be assigned to see that animals are properly cared for in a clean, safe setting with ample food and water. The grounds would be developed with a native plant garden for use of the interpretive center. Major building maintenance would be handled by outside contractors, while minor repairs and cleaning would be done by our volunteers. During the development and construction, the Steering Committee will be responsible for hiring contractors and all administrative tasks. Following completion, they will be responsible for seeing that bills are paid in a timely fashion for utilities and other costs.

Benefits and MROSD Goals

The benefits of our proposed use of the property are many. Directly in line with MROSD goals, our proposal will : 1) restore the natural environment by controlling invasive species and planting native plants to improve habitat and creeks; 2) provide connections with schools and scientists; 3) open up lands to all, including the disabled and young people; 4) emphasize learning about the environment and promoting good stewardship; 5) honor and learn about the heritage of the land and past ways of living; 6) encourage volunteer stewardship; and 7) provide rich opportunities for visitors.

Proposed Public Access

Our proposal would be to have the Nature Center open to the public at least on weekends and for groups such as school classes or organizations by reservation during the week. The public access would be similar to that at the Daniels Interpretive Center. This center would be served by knowledgeable volunteer docents from the local community as well as seasoned MROSD volunteers. Portola Valley is blessed with many scientists, naturalists, and geologists, including many retired from the nearby USGS. Because the site is only a short walking distance from three local schools, there could be close interaction between the Nature Center and the local schools to enrich teaching. The grounds would be open during daylight hours year-round, as is the Arastradero Preserve.

Materials

We have extensive collections of natural artifacts to share with the community through the proposed Nature Center. Animal specimens include bobcat, porcupine, skunk, and assorted rodent and bat specimens, as well as deer antlers. The collection also contains many bones, including a huge whale vertebra, skulls of domestic animals (horse, cow, sheep), deer, and various carnivores. There are also numerous bird specimens, as well as bird feathers, nests, and eggs. In addition there is a large collection of rocks and minerals including geodes, petrified wood, crystals, and various fossils. There are also insects, oak galls, bee hives, and wasp nests. In short, we already have the materials for a richly endowed nature center. Display furnishings and posters, as well as a large collection of nature and science books would also be made available along with a teaching curriculum and materials to develop the program. The native plant garden would be labeled to provide information about the plants for people who visit the grounds without a docent.

Implementation Schedule

1. Negotiation phase
Develop draft of land lease and funding plan, 2-3 months.
2. Approval phase
Take to District Board for approval, 2-3 months.
3. Design phase
In coordination with MROSD, plan layout for trails, parking, and restrooms as well as utilities—water and electricity including plans for sewer hook-up or septic tank. Complete design of structure for Nature Center.
4. Permitting phase
Obtain required permits and then assume lease responsibilities.
5. Construction phase
Construct the Nature Center building and hook up to utilities.
6. Occupancy phase
Set up furnishings and displays and schedule hours of operation.

Conceptual Budget

1. **Design and Engineering:** We are currently working with Bill Stronck who has done several historic restorations in San Mateo County including the Folger Barn and County Courthouse.
2. **Permitting:** Since the project is in Portola Valley, these costs will depend on the Town, which has encouraged us to submit the proposal.
3. **Construction—Infrastructure and site improvements:** Since the MROSD bond issue passed, improvements such as parking areas, restrooms, and trails will, we assume, be undertaken by MROSD, including water, electrical, and septic tank or sewer connections

from the street. We would cover the cost of constructing the building and the costs associated with hooking the building up to utilities and providing internet connections.

4. Annual or Periodic Maintenance & Operation: MROSD will maintain the natural areas, and we will depend on volunteers for broom and weed removal near the Nature Center structure. However, there would be ongoing costs to the Friends of Hawthorn to keep the trees near the building trimmed for fire safety and to provide periodic interior and exterior painting and re-roofing and ongoing maintenance of plumbing and electrical systems.

Financing

To finance the Center, we will first approach those who have already signed up to donate, in order to obtain a firm commitment and a pledge amount. While these potential donors may be willing to contribute enough to build a Nature Center, if the amount should fall short, we would contract with a well-established fundraiser to conduct a fundraising campaign. In addition, we will look into the possibility of obtaining grants. The tentative plan is to place the money being raised in a fund for Hawthorns through the nonprofit San Mateo County Historical Society. The goal will include not only the estimated cost for construction of the building, but also funds for an endowment to cover ongoing expenses. Once the infrastructure is complete, construction of the Nature Center could begin. Donations will continue to be accepted after the construction is completed.

PRELIMINARY INCOME FORECAST

Donations from major donors	\$2,000,000
Grant from a foundation	100,000
Donations from campaign	<u>400,000</u>
TOTAL	\$2,500,000

Preferred Terms of Partnership Agreement

Our preference would be to have a long-term partnership. We envision a short-term lease perhaps for the first year or maybe two as we are better able to assess the scope of the project, followed by a thirty- to fifty-year partnership lease with the option to renew every thirty to fifty years would be reasonable. We would ask MROSD to maintain the roads, trails, and parking areas. We would also want adequate security on the property through the frequent presence of a ranger.

General Contact and Nature Center

Joaquin Road, Portola Valley, CA 94028

Construction contact:

Bill Stronck, Gonsalves & Stronck Construction Company
1000 Washington Street, San Carlos, CA 94070

Architect contact:

Adolph Rosekrans

History contacts:

Nancy Lund (Portola Valley Town Historian)

Mitch Postel (San Mateo County Historical Association)