



**Town of Tiburon
STAFF REPORT**

AGENDA ITEM _____

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TO: **Parks, Open Space and Trails Commission**

FROM: **Scott Anderson, Director of Community Development
Nicholas Nguyen, Director of Public Works/ Town Engineer**

SUBJECT: **Draft Open Space Resource Management Plan: Review and Forward
Comments to the Town Council**

MEETING DATE: **September 21, 2010**
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BACKGROUND

The Town of Tiburon owns over 250 acres of open space land which is widely distributed throughout the peninsula. The Town has acquired these lands gradually over time, starting with municipal incorporation in 1964 when certain lands were transferred (i.e., “inherited”) from the County of Marin. Since that time, the major sources of acquisition have been through public purchase (primarily with 1972 open space bond monies) and dedication by landowners through the development review process. Many of the open space parcels are isolated or not otherwise contiguous to other open space parcels. For its first 20 years, Tiburon’s focus was on the continued acquisition of open space lands for public use, with minimal resources placed toward stewardship and management of existing open space. Beginning in the 1980’s, the Town shifted its focus to preserving newly-created open spaces as “private” open space, with the Town holding open space or conservation easements over such lands to act as an enforcement mechanism.

In 2005, the Town Council recognized the need to balance future acquisition with ongoing management of existing open space lands and established an open space management reserve fund. Each year since that time, the Council has appropriated and expended capital improvement funds for open space management purposes. Overgrown fire roads were cleared and repaired, invasive species removal was initiated, and areas where protected plant species live were targeted for protective work. The need for an overall plan to prioritize the Town’s limited resources available for open space management was recognized early, and in July of 2008, the Town Council authorized the preparation of an Open Space Management Plan (OSMP) to address the vast majority of the Town’s open space lands. Staff notes that the OSMP does not address Railroad Marsh, which is a wetland (as opposed to upland) open space, and which already has an adopted management plan.

In November 2008, the firm of LSA Associates of Point Richmond was retained to prepare the OSMP, and has worked closely with Town staff to produce the draft document now before the POST Commission.

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ANALYSIS

Purpose and Emphasis of the OSMP

The primary purposes of the OSMP are that it provides an inventory and description of each open space area, identifies the management issues associated with each open space area, and makes prioritization suggestions for the most effective and efficient use of limited Town resources available for open space management. There is a wide range of relative community value among the twenty-one parcels addressed in the OSMP. Some open space parcels are seldom used by the public, have little recreational or biological value, and act mostly as visual buffers. Other parcels have significant recreational and/or biological value, contain well-used public trails (including portions of the Tiburon Ridge Trail), and form significant visual buffers and/or greenbelt separators between neighborhoods. Many of the open space parcels abut developed neighborhoods and can be a source of fuel-loading for wildland fires.

The primary emphasis of this OSMP is management of vegetation. The overwhelming abundance of French broom, and to a lesser extent other invasive non-native species, becomes readily apparent after visiting the open space parcels. The non-native vegetation species increase the fire hazard and threaten sensitive biological resources. Managing non-native vegetation species responds to three of the Town's primary open space management concerns:

- 1) Reduction of fire hazards and fuel loading
- 2) Control of invasive, non-native species
- 3) Protection of sensitive biological resources

Other topic areas such as trail maintenance, erosion prevention, and passive recreational use are discussed in this management plan, but with more emphasis on how these issues relate to the primary vegetation management goals of the OSMP. For example, certain hiking trail segments have become overwhelmed and made largely impassable by the proliferation of French broom.

The OSMP's color graphics are impressive in their mapping of the various vegetation types on the open space lands, including mapping and identification by species of relatively small pockets of invasive plant occurrences, as well as larger-scale infestations. The document's primary author, Dr. Clint Kellner of LSA Associates, will make a brief presentation of the OSMP to the Commission.

A critical element of this OSMP, contained in Appendix A, is a prioritization of management tasks. Prioritization is important because the management needs on the 250 acres of open space lands are much greater than the Town's limited resources to address them. Appendix A assigns priority from 1 to 9 to the various management activities identified in the OSMP, provides a rough cost estimate, and suggests possible methods of implementation. The Department of Public Works anticipates using Appendix A as one of its primary sources when developing funding and implementation plans for future management of the Town's open space lands.

The Public Works Department believes that the OSMP represents a good starting point towards effectively and efficiently maintaining the Town's open space. The plan will serve as a network-wide review, giving staff a general understanding of the issues, an order of magnitude of the issues and

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where they may be located. But, ultimately, the Town must utilize the report to fine-tune its short-term and long-term maintenance strategies as they apply to our specific needs, local demands, and existing budgets.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

Adoption of the Open Space Management Plan would constitute a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Draft OSMP does not in itself authorize work to be performed in the open space and is a “program-type” document under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), meaning that additional environmental review will sometimes be necessary before specific physical actions are undertaken in furtherance of the OSMP recommendations and approaches.

An Initial Study and Draft Negative Declaration was prepared by Town staff for the OSMP, and concludes that for the program level of review, all potentially significant impacts would be avoided or reduced to less-than-significant levels through mitigation measures. The initial study concluded that potentially significant impacts could occur with respect to biological resources and geology/soils, the latter primarily concerning erosion resulting from extensive groundcover removal of invasive species, such as French broom, in certain open space lands. Biological resource concerns focused on the presence of protected species on a few of the open space lands, mostly in the Middle Ridge Area of the peninsula.

FUTURE STEPS

Following review and comment by the Parks, Open Space & Trails Commission, the Draft OSMP will be forwarded to the Town Council for review and possible adoption.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission:

1. Accept the staff report and the presentation by LSA Associates.
2. Hear and consider any public testimony.
3. If prepared to do so, consider and make comments of the Draft OSMP and its Initial Study/Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration, and forward those comments to the Town Council for consideration.

EXHIBITS

1. Draft Open Space Management Plan
2. Initial Study/Draft Negative Declaration