



TOWN OF FAIRFAX

STAFF REPORT

May 28, 2015

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Garrett Toy, Town Manager 
Jim Moore, Director of Planning and Building Services

SUBJECT: Adopt a Resolution Supporting Priority Conservation Area Designation for Three Zones within the Town of Fairfax Sphere of Influence and Authorizing the Town Manager to Submit an Application to the Association of Bay Area Governments for such Designation

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a resolution supporting the Fairfax Open Space Committee's (FOSC) specified Priority Conservation Area ("PCA") designations within and around the Town of Fairfax and authorize the Town Manager to submit applications for such designations to the Association of Bay Area Governments.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Association of Bay Area Governments ("ABAG") initiated a regional process (the "FOCUS PCA" process) to identify certain land within the Bay Area that should be given priority for preservation and protection as open space, public access and natural resource areas. These areas would be specified as a Priority Conservation Area ("PCA"). In 2007, the "Central Marin Ridgeland" were nominated as a FOCUS PCA and subsequently approved by ABAG.

In 2014, as part of the broader "Plan Bay Area Implementation" effort, ABAG staff worked with local jurisdictions, the ABAG administrative committee and stakeholders to develop a PCA program update. Adopted by ABAG on July 17, 2014, this update specified a process for the confirmation of existing PCAs and allowed for application for new and modified proposed PCAs. Attached to this brief staff report is a detailed report from the FOSC articulating three new and/or modified PCA's, their attributes, and how their designation as PCA's supports the goals of the General Plan.

The Town Council first considered this matter at their May 6, 2015 meeting and asked that the FOSC revise the map so that it more accurately reflects which areas and/or parcels are intended to be included in the PCA's. Those revisions have been made and are attached to Exhibit A for Council consideration. Please Note: the application is due by May 30, 2015.

FISCAL IMPACT

Staff and consultant time putting application material together

ATTACHMENTS

Resolution
FOSC Memorandum with revised map

RESOLUTION NO. 15-14

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF FAIRFAX SUPPORTING PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREA (PCA) DESIGNATION FOR THREE ZONES WITHIN THE TOWN OF FAIRFAX SPHERE OF INFLUENCE AND AUTHORIZING THE TOWN MANAGER TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO THE ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS FOR SUCH DESIGNATION

WHEREAS, in 2007 the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) requested nominations from local governments and land conservation organizations for Priority Conservation Areas (PCA) pursuant to the "Focusing our Vision" multi-agency regional planning initiative; and

WHEREAS, in August 2007 the Town of Fairfax approved nomination of the "Central Marin Ridglands" as a FOCUS PCA that was subsequently approved by ABAG; and

WHEREAS, on July 17, 2014 ABAG adopted a program update process as part of the broader "Plan Bay Area Implementation" effort, allowing applications for new and/or modified PCA's; and

WHEREAS, the ABAG PCA designation process is intended to provide a framework for directing future regional funding for the purpose of acquiring lands or acquiring conservation easements over lands which have been designated as PCA's because of significant natural resource, open space, urban greening and recreational values; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Fairfax desires to enhance the possibility of future regional funding for the acquisition of local land or of conservation easements over local land where that land has significant natural resource, open space, urban greening and recreational values, should the land become available for acquisition.

WHEREAS, the revised PCA program guidelines for new or modified PCA nominations recognize land with attributes in the categories of Natural Landscapes, Agricultural, Urban Greening and/or Regional Recreation; and

WHEREAS, the Fairfax Open Space Committee (FOSC) has determined that all three new and/or modified proposed PCA's within the Town of Fairfax "Sphere of Influence" meet the characteristics of Natural Landscape, Urban Greening and Regional Recreation needed for designation; and

WHEREAS, the designation of these lands as PCA's is consistent with goals contained in the Town of Fairfax 2010-2030 General Plan- Open Space Element;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Fairfax Town Council:

- 1) Endorses the following three Priority Conservation Areas, as listed below and described and mapped as attached:

Zone 1-Western Fairfax/Tamarancho/Cascade. This PCA area is generally located to the west of the developed areas of Fairfax and encompasses the undeveloped or under-developed and recreational lands within Zone 1.

Zone 2 - Southern Fairfax Meadow/San Anselmo. This PCA area is generally located to the south of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and encompasses the undeveloped or under-developed and recreational lands within Zone 2.

Zone 3- Sleepy Hollow/Oak Manor/Wall/The Alameda/Red Hill. This PCA area is generally located to the north of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and encompasses the undeveloped or under-developed and recreational lands within Zone 3.

- 2) Authorizes the Town Manager to do everything necessary and appropriate to submit a PCA application to ABAG and to accept the designation if granted by ABAG.

The foregoing Resolution was duly passed and adopted at a meeting of the Town Council of the Town of Fairfax held in said Town on the 28th day of May 2015, by the following vote, to wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

Barbara Coler, Mayor

Attest

Michele Gardner, Town Clerk

FAIRFAX OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 28, 2015

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Mimi Newton, Chair, Fairfax Open Space Committee
Jack Judkins, Co-Chair, Fairfax Open Space Committee

SUBJECT: Priority Conservation Area (“PCA”) designations within the Town of Fairfax Sphere of Influence

RECOMMENDATION

The Fairfax Open Space Committee (FOSC) recommends that the Town Council support specified Priority Conservation Area (“PCA”) designations within and around the Town of Fairfax and authorize the Town Manager to submit applications for such designations to the Association of Bay Area Governments.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Association of Bay Area Governments (“ABAG”) initiated a regional process (the “FOCUS PCA” process) to identify certain land within the Bay Area that should be given priority for preservation and protection as open space, public access and natural resource areas. These areas would be specified as a Priority Conservation Area (“PCA”). In 2007, the “Central Marin Ridgeland” were nominated as a FOCUS PCA and was subsequently approved by ABAG. Within the Town of Fairfax, the Central Marin Ridgeland PCA encompasses the ridgelines: a) north of Sir Francisco Drake Boulevard and immediately east of the Loma Alta Open Space Preserve (including the Wall Property) ; b) west of Sir Francisco Drake Boulevard and immediately east of the Cascade Canyon Open Space Preserve; and c) east of Deer Park and flanking the north and south borders of Bald Hill Park (including the recently acquired Sky Oaks Ranch).

In 2014, as part of the broader “Plan Bay Area Implementation” effort, ABAG staff worked with local jurisdictions, the ABAG administrative committee and stakeholders to develop a PCA program update. Adopted by ABAG on July 17, 2014, this update specified a process for the confirmation of existing PCAs and allowed for application for new and modified proposed PCAs.

Under the updated PCA process, the Central Marin Ridgeland PCA was re-confirmed by ABAG in 2014. The guidelines require that any applications for new or modified PCAs be submitted to ABAG by May 30, 2015, and that each

application be supported by a resolution of the governing body of the jurisdiction in which the proposed PCA is located.

The revised PCA guidelines for new or modified PCA nominations recognize that priority designation is appropriate for land that encompasses one or more of the following four attributes:

Natural Landscapes--areas critical to the functioning of wildlife and plant habitats, aquatic ecosystems and the region's water supply and quality.

Agricultural Lands--farmland, grazing land and timberland that support the region's agricultural economy and provide additional benefits such as habitat protection and carbon capture.

Urban Greening--existing and potential green spaces in cities that increase habitat connectivity, improve community health, capture carbon emissions, and address stormwater.

Regional Recreation--existing and potential regional parks, trails, and other publicly accessible recreation facilities.

The Town created the Fairfax Open Space Committee (FOSC) by resolution in 2004. Under that resolution, FOSC is charged with the responsibility “to determine the availability of unique, threatened, or environmentally sensitive land parcels that may be appropriate to acquire to hold in perpetuity as dedicated open space for the public”. Further, under the Town General Plan, Open Space Element, FOSC is identified as the Town organization with the primary responsibility for identifying and prioritizing lands for preservation as open space, public access and natural resource protection. Under this authority, as detailed below, FOSC has identified three new (or modified) PCA's within and around the Town of Fairfax and seeks Town approval for the application to ABAG for these proposed designations.

DISCUSSION

The three new and/or modified PCAs identified by FOSC are generally described as follows, and illustrated on the attached map:

Zone 1 – Western Fairfax/Tamarancho/Cascade. This PCA area is generally located to the west of the developed areas of Fairfax and encompasses the undeveloped or under-developed and recreational lands within Zone 1. Generally, the area within the proposed PCA is characterized by sloping lands or ridgeland areas that connect to existing and protected open space (MMWD lands, Marin County Open Space District lands and Mt. Tamalpias State Park), consists of woodland or coastal grass vegetation, and includes many recreational trails, formal or informal, which have been used for many decades by the public and

provide for linkage to existing public trail systems. The lands within this area adjoin the area already designated as a PCA under the previously approved and confirmed Central Marin Ridgeland PCA designation.

Zone 2: Southern Fairfax Meadow/San Anselmo. This PCA area is generally located to the south of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and encompasses the undeveloped or under-developed and recreational lands within Zone 2. Generally, the area within the proposed PCA is characterized by undeveloped lands with stream, wetland and meadow riparian areas and by sloping lands and ridgeland areas adjacent or near to the Fairfax/San Anselmo border. The upland border areas connect to existing and protected open space (the Bald Mountain area protected open space lands) and consists of woodland or coastal grass vegetation, and include many recreational trails, formal or informal, which have been used for many decades by the public and provide for linkage to existing public trail systems. The riparian area also provides the potential for recreational activity. The lands within this area adjoin the area already designated as a PCA under the previously approved and confirmed Central Marin Ridgeland PCA designation.

Zone 3 – Sleepy Hollow/Oak Manor/Wall/The Alameda/Red Hill. This PCA area is generally located to the north of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and encompasses the undeveloped or under-developed and recreational lands within Zone 3. Generally, the area within the proposed PCA is characterized by sloping lands or ridgeland areas that connect to existing and protected open space (lands owned by the Town of San Anselmo and the Town of Fairfax and Marin County Open Space District lands), consists of woodland or coastal grass vegetation, and includes a number of recreational trails, formal or informal, which have been used for many decades by the public and provide for linkage to existing public trail systems. The lands within this area adjoin the area already designated as a PCA under the previously approved and confirmed Central Marin Ridgeland PCA designation.

The lands within each of these three proposed PCAs squarely meet three of the characteristics needed for designation.¹ Each of these three zones consist of predominately "natural landscape", in that most of the lands are adjacent to existing open space areas, consist of native redwood, bay, oak, or manzanita woodlands or coastal scrub or grassland vegetation, which provide habitat and corridors for wildlife. In addition, much of the land also contains or drains to creeks and streams. Likewise, each proposed PCA provides substantial benefits in the form of "urban greening". For the most part, the lands in the proposed

¹ The proposed PCAs include some parcels that have been developed. The intent was to include the undeveloped or underdeveloped areas within the proposed PCAs, NOT the developed portions of these parcels.

PCAs provide and enhance a greenbelt and a wildlife connection between existing urban development and existing, protected open space areas. In addition, as noted, much of the land provides water drainage to riparian areas. Finally, each proposed PCA provides significant “regional recreational” opportunities. Much of the land contains existing trails used by the public and connected to other existing regional trail systems, such as the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Marin County Open Space District trail system, and Town of San Anselmo and Fairfax trails. With those linkages, the public would be able to access the trail systems in Golden Gate National Recreational Area, Point Reyes, and Mt. Tam State Park (amongst others) and travel on public trails by foot or bike from Fairfax to Novato to the north, from Fairfax to the ocean to the west and from Fairfax to San Francisco Bay to the South.

How These PCA Proposals Support the Goals of the Fairfax General Plan

Identifying areas within and around Fairfax as PCAs furthers a number of important goals, objectives and policies set forth in the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the Fairfax General Plan. For example, the introduction to the Conservation Element states:

“ . . . For the purpose of this Conservation Element, sustainability connotes not only the desire to protect and maintain existing resources for future generations, *but to aggressively pursue policies that potentially protect resources beyond our borders. . .*” (Emphasis added.) At CON 6.

While the proposed PCAs do extend beyond Fairfax’s borders, the rationale for including lands outside of Fairfax in our proposed PCAs is that these undeveloped lands have a big impact on the Town and its residents. In turn, it is also true that what happens in Fairfax impacts the neighborhoods around us, which is yet another good reason for Fairfax to aggressively pursue policies that protect our area’s natural resources.

Goal 3 of the General Plan’s Conservation Element, for example, focuses on watershed and stream management. The General Plan points out that the efforts that we undertake to protect the creeks and watershed have benefits beyond our borders:

Fairfax lies at the confluence of San Anselmo Creek and Fairfax Creek, establishing the headwaters of Corte Madera Creek . . . Fairfax is at the head of the Ross Valley watershed, and the policies and programs identified are intended to improve protection measures for creek and watershed process not only within the Town, but downstream through a series of other communities to San Francisco Bay. At CON -17.

Wildlife conservation is also at the heart of Fairfax’s Conservation Element (see Goal 6). Wildlife are not constrained by political boundaries and the proposed PCAs also strive to connect undeveloped portions of Fairfax and its surrounding

areas to protected natural zones to the north, west and south of Town. Again, the General Plan states:

We are bordered by Marin Open Space on Loma Alta to the north, Mt. Tam State Park and MMWD land to the west and south, and the Golden Gate Recreation Area to the far west.

Wildlife habitats of many kinds cover all these areas and it is important to understand and allow for both seasonal and resident wildlife use of the habitat. We need to maintain and protect wildlife migration corridors on both a micro and macro scale, understanding the species we live with and the species that pass through. Healthy stream corridors, connections between lowland and upland habitat, areas of low human disturbance, contiguous stands of mature trees, open meadow, riparian cover all help maintain a diverse and resilient landscape mosaic that supports and honors the diversity of life of which we are a part. At CON-28.

The PCAs presented for your consideration were specifically developed by FOSC in an effort to maximize the potential for preservation of un-fragmented habitat and corridors to help ease wildlife's ability to co-exist with us. Fairfax is in the unique geographical location of being the "gateway" to West Marin and its vast areas of natural landscapes and the preservation of undeveloped and underdeveloped land in our location may help act as a buffer for the West Marin wildlife who may wander eastward, and we don't just mean the residents of Bolinas.

Designating the proposed zones as PCAs may also assist the Town in its efforts to preserve undeveloped land should such opportunities arise in the future. As set forth in the Open Space Element, Fairfax residents may not be fully aware of development risks to areas that they currently enjoy as open space.

Much of what appears to be undeveloped or underdeveloped open space land within the Fairfax Planning Area is, in fact, privately held land that is not restricted to open space use. Much of this land may be assumed to be "designated open space" by the general public, when it is not. Even if development on those lands is constrained now, changes in technology, or the political or economic environment in the future may create opportunity for development that would affect the open space character of these lands. At OS-7.

Designating these areas of undeveloped and underdeveloped properties as PCAs dovetails not only with the General Plan's goals for conservation and open space but also supports the open space goals of the County², and adjacent

² The Countywide Plan includes numerous policies that align with the designation of the proposed zones as PCAs. These include: the preservation and protection of native habitat and sensitive resources (Section 2.4); preserving and improving water and watershed quality (section 2.5); and closing gaps in the pattern of protected public open

municipalities, especially San Anselmo.³

Generally, the types of properties envisioned for conservation by the Fairfax General Plan include: lands that connect or expand existing open space, create wildlife corridors, or preserve endangered species; lands along creek channels and in flood-prone areas; lands that provide recreational, cultural, educational, and spiritual experiences to our residents and visitors; and lands that preserve the visual appeal of the natural landscape. See, e.g., Goal OS-3. Objectives OS-1.3, OS-3.2, CON-3.1. The proposed PCAs constitute an attempt to capture these attributes in a map and proclaim the import of these lands in their undeveloped, natural state by the citizens of Fairfax.

For these reasons, FOSC recommends that these new PCAs be approved and that the Council adopt the proposed resolution.

FISCAL IMPACT

None. The recommended action is solely for purposes of endorsing application to ABAG for PCA status, which involves no cost to the Town. It is possible that Town funds may be expended for items such as mapping, printing, GIS work, and development of other material necessary for the application.

ATTACHMENTS

Map of Three Proposed PCAs

space and private lands where land acquisition or other methods of preservation would create or enhance community separators, wildlife corridors, watershed and baylands protection, riparian corridors, sensitive habitat, or trail connections (Goal OS-2).

³ The Land Use, Open Space and Conservation Elements of the San Anselmo General Plan include broad statements of policy in favor of: conserving the small town character of the community and its close relationships with the natural beauty of the Town’s setting; protecting and preserving areas of unique natural and visual resources; preserving town identity by the preservation of greenbelts between communities as buffer zones to provide view corridors, recreation needs and natural habitat for wildlife; and maintain the visual presence of woodlands, riparian areas, and stream courses. San Anselmo General Plan at pp. 4, 7, 10, 41, 43. The San Anselmo General Plan also includes a policy to protect undeveloped and agricultural lands outside the San Anselmo “urban service area” from urban expansion. San Anselmo General Plan Policy 2.3 at p. 5.