

# Planning a gateway to open space and miles of public trails in the heart of Moraga

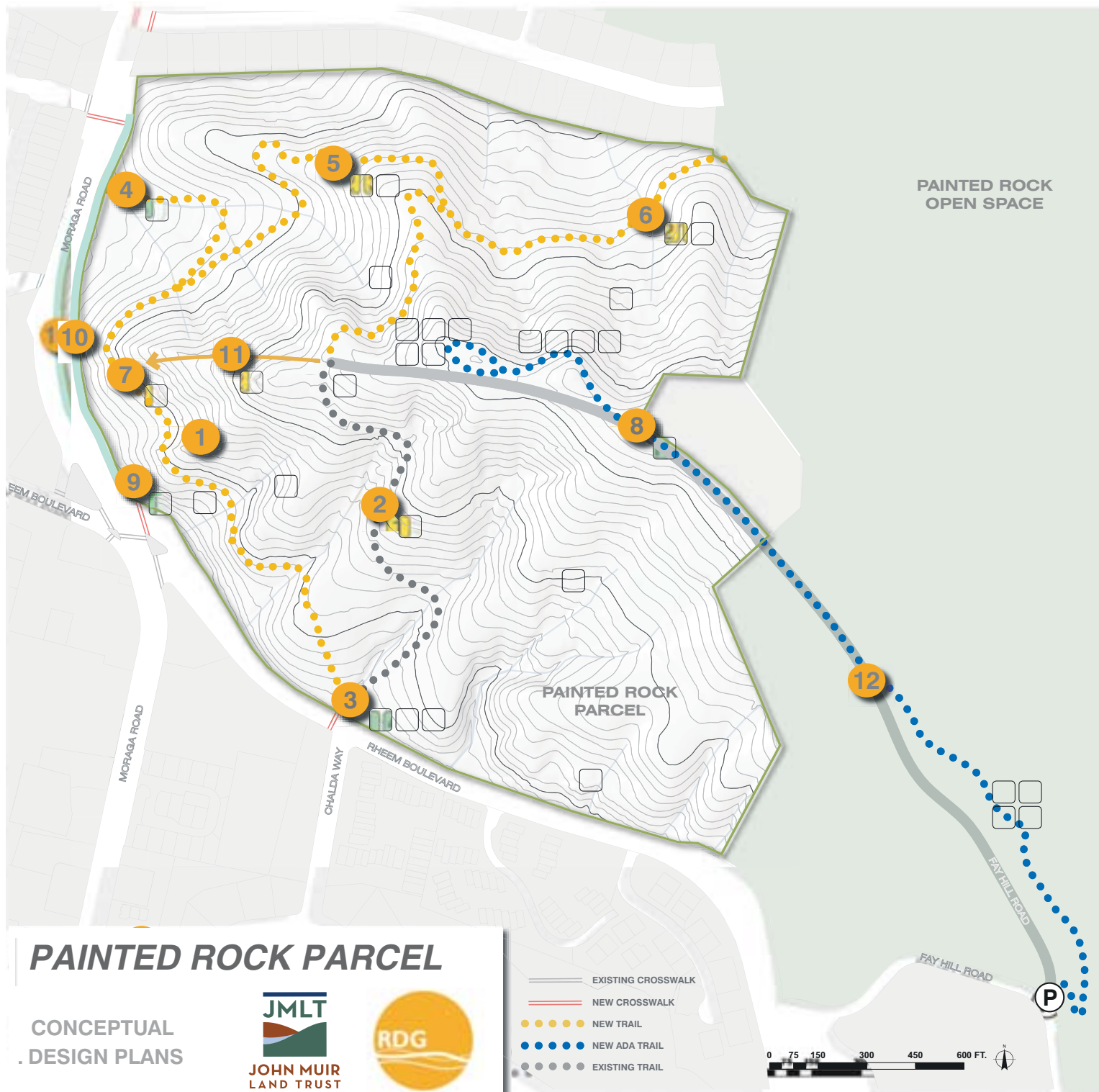
By Sophie Braccini

The vision to access hundreds of acres of open space from the Rheem Shopping Center and linking a busy town center to miles of trails and recreation opportunities could materialize this year, but the John Muir Land Trust, which has raised half of the necessary \$2 million to buy the Painted Rock property, is still short of funds. The JMLT is now relying on private generosity to close a deal that must be finalized by May of this year. A new matching grant could bridge the gap if the community rallies around this opportunity.

The 84 acres of vacant land located at the northeast corner of Moraga Road and Rheem Boulevard used to belong to Roger Poynt, who passed away over four years ago; his widow put the centrally located lot up for sale for \$11 million, but struck a deal with the JMLT for a fraction of that price to turn her property into wild space open to the public in perpetuity. Linus Eukel, the executive director of the nonprofit that has patiently acquired land all over the East Bay, explains that the trust was specifically interested in that relatively small parcel because it is a missing piece of a puzzle connecting open parcels preserved for wildlife and people's recreation in Lamorinda and beyond.

The JMLT is inviting locals to look at and discuss design concepts on Thursday, March 14 that are being developed by the Restoration Design Group. The informational session will be held from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at the Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga, with the design presentation scheduled for 6:30. People will see how a network of trails could link open spaces in Moraga with Rancho Laguna and Palos Colordos trails, as well as space north to Lafayette, west to Orinda as well as to the other hundreds of acres of open space toward the San Leandro Reservoir.

At the Feb. 27 Moraga Town Council meeting, members requested that an update from JMLT be presented at a coming meeting to see how close it is to reaching its goal and to see what else the town could do to support the effort. The town's mayor, Roger Wykle, explained that the council absolutely agrees that



## PAINTED ROCK PARCEL

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PLANS



- EXISTING CROSSWALK
- NEW CROSSWALK
- NEW TRAIL
- NEW ADA TRAIL
- EXISTING TRAIL

- 1 PAINTED ROCKS
- 2 EXISTING RANCH ROAD
- 3 RHEEM / CHALDA ENTRY, WITH NEW CROSSWALK
- 4 MEADOW ENTRY
- 5 MEADOW TO RIDGE TRAIL (GENTLE GRADE)
- 6 CONNECTOR TRAIL TO PAINTED ROCK OPEN SPACE
- 7 PAINTED ROCK TRAIL
- 8 ACCESSIBLE RIDGELINE TRAIL WITH PARKING
- 9 RHEEM / MORAGA ENTRY WITH NEW CROSSWALK
- 10 NEW SIDEWALK ON MORAGA ROAD
- 11 PAINTED ROCK TRAIL FROM RIDGE (WITH STEPS)
- 12 ACCESSIBLE RIDGELINE TRAIL EXTENSION

Courtesy JMLT - the Restoration Design Group

One of the conceptual designs possible for the Painted Rock (modified)

new donations and is being offered to encourage everyone to help get them across the finish line.

The March 14 meeting will be an important moment for the trust to make its case to residents about all the wildlife opportunities that will be opened to them when Painted Rock becomes public and trails are developed. Wykle says that he plans on attending the March 14 presentation and expects that other council members and staff will as well.

the acquisition of the Painted Rock area by the JMLT would be good. So far the town has not been able to contribute any funds to the campaign, but the council discussed during the recent council meeting the use of some of the Palos Colorados funds to support the Painted Rock acquisition.

The mayor noted, however, that the town has many unfunded and competing needs at the moment and the council has not reached a final decision. This is why, knowing the town's financial situation, Eukel and his development team are engaging the general public, getting some buy-in for future plans

and asking residents to "put skin in the game."

"Today, at end of February, we have raised \$1.45 million, of which \$350K is a challenge match for new gifts received by May 1," explained Eukel. He added that the challenge match comes from anonymous donors, and is very generous as it doubles

## Miramonte girls soccer NorCal champions!

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A strong defensive effort helped the Mats defeat No. 4 Kingsburg in the first round of the NorCal tourney, with sophomore Angelina Basso scoring the lone goal. McQuain gave

credit to Whipple and Grant for their defensive efforts against a team with one of the highest scoring players in the state.

The NorCal championship game was nearly a repeat performance of the NCS playoffs, as Campolindo fell one game shy

of reaching the finals, falling to El Camino of Sacramento, 2-0. The Cougars previously upset No. 2 Sacred Heart Prep in Atherton 3-2 to make it as far as the semifinals.

Miramonte and Campolindo met in the NCS finals,

with the 2-1 match being decided on a corner kick that

Walthall bent into the net untouched with no time left on the clock. Incredibly, it was Walthall's second corner kick goal of the game. Celia Campo scored the lone goal for the

Cougars.

McQuain gave credit to assistant coach Joe McMahon, who is in his third year with the program. "Joe was a big part of everything this year and we really couldn't have done it without him."

## Consolidation of Design Review Board and Planning Commission

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Farmer noted a decline in the number of persons interested in sitting on the DRB. In 2017, there were nine DRB meetings mostly regarding one major item and a few more were only for additions to a single family home. In 2018, several members of the DRB moved over to the Planning Commission, and their vacated positions were never filled. Farmer has encouraged residents who are interested to fill those positions, but to no avail. The DRB needs a quorum to operate and it currently doesn't have one.

Farmer feels that the consolidation would benefit developers and applicants by saving them time and money. They wouldn't have to go back and forth between departments in order to get a permit. He stated, "We are a cost recovery department, and we bill staff time to the applicant."

According to Farmer, the

state of California doesn't require municipalities to have a DRB the way it does a planning commission. Orinda has already consolidated theirs and Lafayette is watching Moraga's process before deciding what route to take.

Members of the DRB agree that the consolidation is a good idea, and the level of additional work for members of the Planning Commission would be minimal. "It's not going to be a culture shock. These people (DRB members) know the town." Farmer adds, "And, because we don't have a DRB quorum this would be a good time to consider consolidating the DRB with the Planning Commission."

Moraga Chamber of Commerce President Bob Fritzky agreed with the recommendation, saying it would make doing business with Moraga that much more attractive to potential developers.

The consolidation would cost the town \$12,000 -

\$15,000 in legal fees to document. Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg noted, "We do have a budget for town attor-

ney costs, so that would fit in with our budget. It wouldn't be additional legal fees."

The town council unani-

mously agreed to allow paperwork for the consolidation process to begin.

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