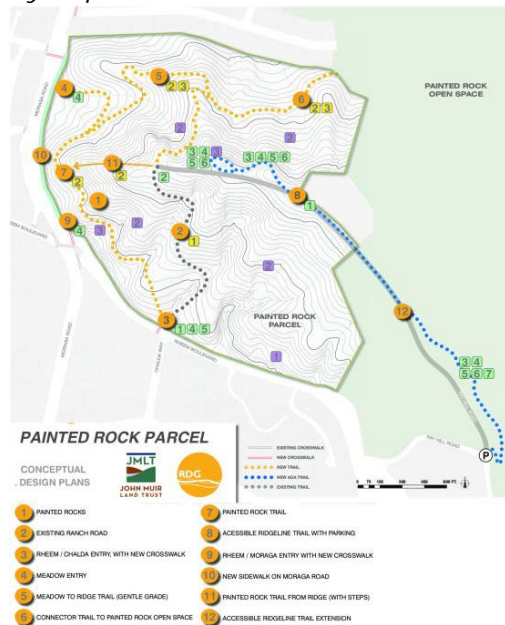




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Planning a gateway to open space and miles of public trails in the heart of Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



One of the conceptual designs possible for the Painted Rock (modified) Courtesy JMLF - the Restoration Design Group

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 Colorados 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 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 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.

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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