

# Midcoast Community Council

*An elected Municipal Advisory Council to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors*

*Serving 12,000 coastal residents*

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## **Via Hand Delivery / E-Mail**

August 16, 2010

Melissa Ross  
Project Planner  
County of San Mateo  
455 County Center, 2nd Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063

Re: Initial Study and Negative Declaration for PLN 2010-00093: Fitzgerald Marine Reserve/Preserve Beach Access Improvements at Nevada and North Lake Street and Improvements to the Dardenelle Trail/California Coastal Trail Between North Lake Street and Cypress Avenue

Dear Ms. Ross:

As the elected representative advisers to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors on behalf of the residents of the unincorporated Midcoast communities of Montara, Moss Beach, Miramar, El Granada, and Princeton-By-The Sea, Midcoast Community Council (MCC) respectfully submits this letter containing comments on the Negative Declaration for PLN 2010-00093 (Dardenelle Trail Improvements).

In short, the council cannot support the Negative Declaration as proposed, but we appreciate the opportunity to engage in a dialog and look forward to having a continued role in this process.

Specifically, we note the following concerns and overarching themes that have been raised during public comment:

- The need to prioritize preserving the natural resource and identify safeguards for its continued existence before encouraging additional visitor traffic.
- The out-of-scale size of the expanded trail being at odds with the character of the surroundings
- The materials being used for surfacing and otherwise being consistent with, and safe for, preserving the natural environment and charm of the surrounding area
- The lack of renderings and/or markings sufficient to identify the nature of the proposed work at the San Vicente Bridge section as well as the ramp section and

retaining wall adjacent to the tide pools on the northern section of San Vicente creek.

The above notwithstanding, we understand that Dave Holland will be responding to comments at our regularly scheduled August 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. We further understand that he is considering changes to trail surfacing, and we request that Dave Holland give a presentation to the public and MCC of the same level that will be presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission. We would like reserve the right to present additional comments based on new information that is presented.

Additionally, we would like to commend the Department of Parks and Recreation for the newly opened staircase providing beach access at Cypress and Ocean Avenues. We have received a number of positive comments from residents who have expressed appreciation for the greatly improved beach access that the new staircase provides and its aesthetic quality that complements the character of the area.

We would also like to point out that we appreciate and applaud the dialog that has taken place between the community and the various planners and stakeholders in the proposed project can serve as a model for community outreach for other County projects, including, for example, the Big Wave project which still lacks story poles and site visits despite having been proposed long before the Dardenelle Trail project.

### **Substantive Comments:**

As we are limiting are comments to the Negative Declaration in this letter, we will refrain at this time from proposing alternative configurations and solutions that will logically follow as a next step if the negative declaration is found to be in need of additional work/analysis.

What we heard in a clear majority of the comments received is that the expanded width of the trail and asphalt surfacing is out of character for an area that is considered a treasure to local residents. While these same residents empathize with the needs of mobility-impaired users to access what they refer to as a "magical," "enchanted" and "intimate" area, they would like to see every effort made to reduce the scale and surfacing of the improvements to minimize impacts that cause the trail expansion set forth in the negative declaration to be "grossly out of scale" with the short run of the trail and its winding, meandering nature. In particular, residents expressed concern over the ferns that immediately abut the trail as well as the frog pond, on private property, adjacent to the trail, noting the importance that these two features provide to the charm of the current path.

Similarly, we note that while the trail markers were a big help in calibrating the public's understanding of what the planned expansion of the trail might look like, the lack of similar markings and/or renderings for the San Vicente Creek footbridge portion, as well as the proposed work done to, and changes made in configuration of the path to the tide pools, were least clearly understood by most residents.

In particular, once the changes to the footbridge were explained, a clear majority of the trail walk participants were shocked by the proposed width of the new bridge, which several noted was "overkill" for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, as well as the new configuration of the bridge, which would now terminate into a blind corner rather than at an intersection with more visibility.

Likewise, while nearly all of those in attendance commented that the connector to the tide pools "needs work" and is all but "impassable" in its current form, many questioned the need for drastic revisions to this ramp in order to accomplish this objective and raised questions about what alternatives were looked at to prevent erosion.

**Conclusion:**

Although the proposed negative declaration has not found significant public support, the process itself has been illuminating and some excellent ideas were put forth in terms of compromise solutions involving alternative, permeable trail surfaces, different replacement footbridge configurations, and changes to the ramp down to the tide pools that likely could garner broad public support.

By including the public in the process, we believe that there is a win-win situation here that will allow a narrower trail with permeable surfacing and more narrow footbridge in line with the current configuration that would be welcomed by the majority of residents and still provide the much needed accessibility and usability improvements sought by the County and consistent with Fitzgerald Marine Reserve's master plan.

For these reasons, we take our position against the current Negative Declaration for PLN 2010-00093 but look forward to being involved in helping to revise and build support for a revised set of plans for this area.

Sincerely,

/signed

Neil Merrilees, Chair  
Midcoast Community Council

Cc: Supervisor Rich Gordon  
Mike Schaller, Senior Planner  
Dave Holland, Director of Parks  
Sam Herzberg, Senior Planner, Parks Department