

To: San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Commission
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) Compliance and the Quarry County Park Master Plan

BACKGROUND:

A master plan is a long-term planning document that establishes a vision and conceptual layout based on community desires and management obligations. Typically, upon adoption, the plan is used to advance priorities, develop projects, and inform policies. A master plan is not a project-specific or policy document. Adopting a master plan does not commit a jurisdiction to carrying out or implementing all policies, programs, or actions (projects) presented in the master plan and does not directly lead to the carrying out of any projects described in the master plan. However, when considering the adoption of a planning document such as a master plan, a jurisdiction must consider its obligations under CEQA to carryout environmental review on the document if it meets the definition of a “Project” under CEQA. Under CEQA, “Project” means an activity which may cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.

Several Projects in Quarry County Park that have already been completed, are under construction, or under current CEQA review are considered as previously addressed by CEQA and therefore are not subject to CEQA environmental review again. These Projects include the following:

- Off-leash dog recreation pilot program
- South Ridge Fire Road connecting Coronado Avenue to the South Ridge Trail
- Bicycle pump track
- Multiple wildfire fuel management projects
- Minor Dam improvements and a new waterline for irrigation and fire suppression
- Multi-Modal Trail on the east side of Highway 1 right-of-way (ROW) connecting the City of Half Moon Bay’s trail to the south and to the north both to Granada Elementary School and Coronado Ave
- A new single vault toilet adjacent to the new pump track
- Expansion of the existing parking lot

Ongoing park operations and maintenance are part of the existing conditions and are also not subject to CEQA review. Planned actions in the Master Plan that have not yet been implemented and that are a Project under CEQA may be subject to future CEQA review. These include the following:

- Quarry County Park mountain bike design standards & formalization of mountain bike trails
- Trail system & signage actions regarding new trails, modifications, and connections
- Visitor facilities and amenities, including the overlook deck and playground
- Natural resource management actions, including implementing high and high-moderate priorities in PWA report to address issues of erosion, runoff, infrastructure, and drainage improvements

DISCUSSION:

Options for the County Parks Department (“Department”) to prepare CEQA analyses from the Quarry Park Master Plan, or for individual Projects or actions identified within the Plan can be summarized as a programmatic approach for CEQA or a Project-specific approach for CEQA. For the programmatic approach, the Department could prepare an Initial Study or Environmental Impact Report that covers all actions described in the Master Plan that are subject to CEQA. This approach could avoid duplicative reconsideration of project considerations and reduce the need to repeat CEQA analysis again in the future. However, if a Project being analyzed is not currently well defined, it may still require CEQA analysis to be repeated in the future once definition of the Project is clear. For the Project-specific approach, each proposed action in the Master Plan that is subject to CEQA would undergo CEQA analysis at the time it is proposed for implementation. This approach would require more than one CEQA document to be prepared as each individual Project is proposed for implementation; however, it also allows for the Department to ensure that the Project is well defined and there is a strong understanding of potential environmental effects that the CEQA analysis can consider.

As long as the Quarry Park Master Plan serves as a planning and policy guidance document only and does not commit the Department to approving or funding future activities identified in the Master Plan, the adoption of the Master Plan would not cause direct or indirect physical impacts to the environment and the consideration of the Master Plan by the Board of Supervisors falls under a statutory exemption under CEQA. In this case, the Department is not obligated to prepare a CEQA document on the Master Plan.

As the Department considers carrying out the programs, policies, and actions identified in the Master Plan, each action would have to be evaluated against the definition of a project under CEQA and if the action meets that requirement, the Department will have to prepare CEQA documentation on that action or Project.