

17.0 MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT (MROSD)

The open space services that are provided by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) are evaluated in this service review.

17.1 LOCATION

The District is a public agency that owns and manages over 55,000 acres of land in 26 open space preserves, 24 of which are open to the public. The District covers an area of 556 square miles in northern Santa Clara and southern San Mateo Counties and a small portion of Santa Cruz County, and includes 17 cities (Atherton, Cupertino, East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Menlo Park, Monte Sereno, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Portola Valley, Redwood City, San Carlos, Saratoga, Sunnyvale, and Woodside).

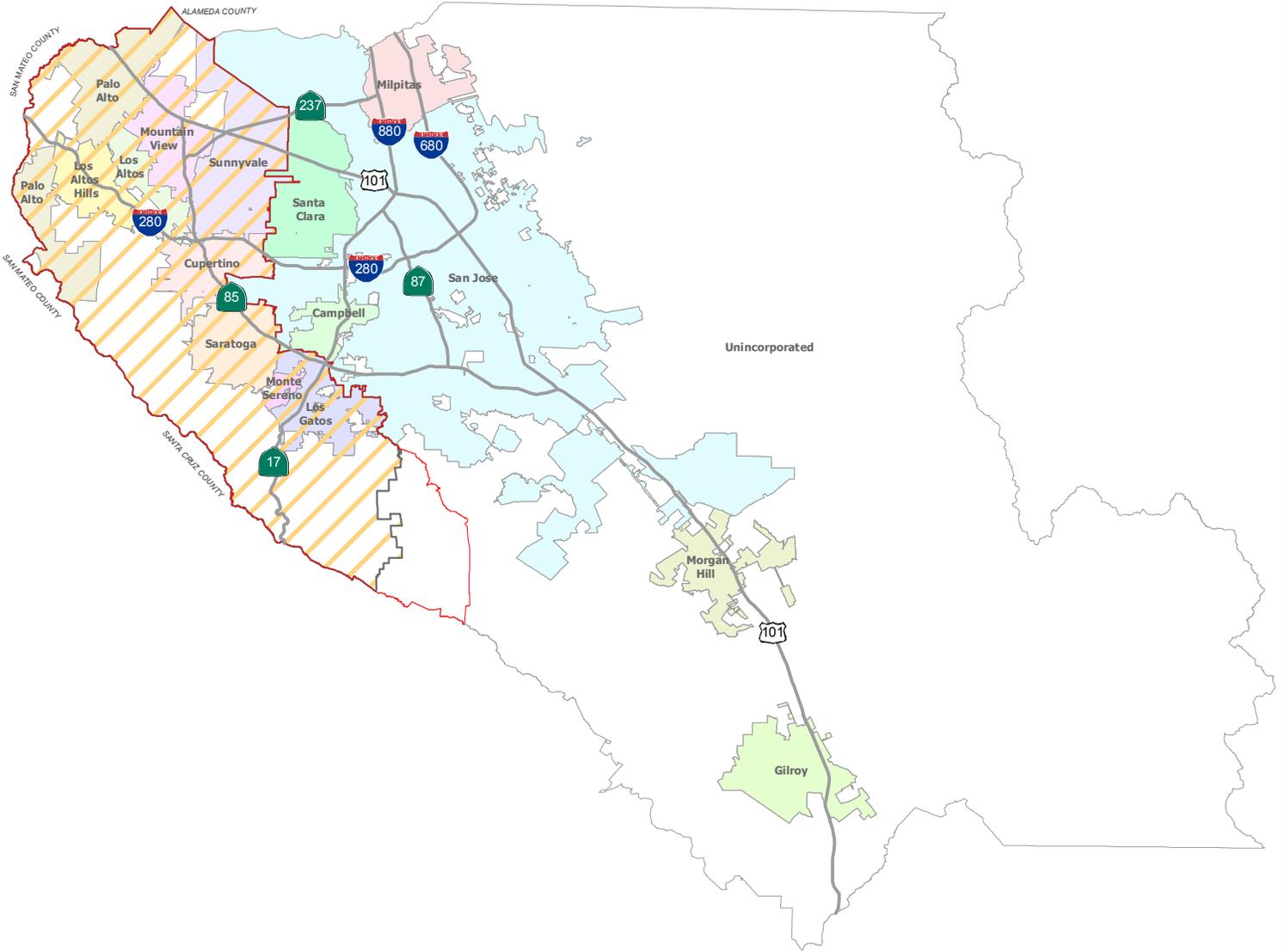
The District was formed in 1972 pursuant to the California Public Resources Code (PRC) beginning with section 5500 et seq., including lands in the northern and western portions of Santa Clara County. In June 1976, the southern and eastern portions of San Mateo County were annexed to the District. The District annexed a small portion of the northern tip of Santa Cruz County in 1992, making it the only tri-County park or Open Space District in the State. In September 2004, the District completed the Coastside Protection Program, which extended the District boundaries to the Pacific Ocean in San Mateo County, from the southern borders of Pacifica to the San Mateo/Santa Cruz County line. This annexation increased the size of the District from 331 to 556 square miles.

17.2 DISTRICT PURPOSE

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's purpose is to purchase, permanently protect, and restore lands forming a regional open space greenbelt; preserve unspoiled wilderness, wildlife habitat, watershed, viewshed, and fragile ecosystems; and provide opportunities for low-intensity recreation and environmental education. The District primarily acquires or otherwise preserves land outside the urban service area (USA) boundaries of cities that has regionally significant open space value.

17.3 GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The District is divided into seven geographic wards, each represented by an elected Board member, for a 4-year term. The Board holds public meetings on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the District offices.



Scale
1:450,000

Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District

District Boundary Within Santa Clara County *District boundary also includes portions of San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County



The public is invited and encouraged to attend these meetings and to participate in the decision-making process. In addition, special public hearings and neighborhood meetings are held periodically on specific issues.

The District works through a variety of means and media to inform the public of the District's goals and objectives. The District maintains a subscriber mailing list of over 70 individuals, organizations, and agencies for announcements of Board meetings and events. The District implements its adopted Public Notification Policy to ensure that a concentrated effort is made to inform surrounding landowners and interested members of the public of District activities that may interest or affect them such as land acquisitions, grant applications, and land use planning projects and policies. The Public Notification Policy supplements any public notice required by law and is intended to provide the broadest opportunity for public participation in and input on various District issues. Press releases are regularly sent to local and regional newspapers to reach a wider public audience.

Staff

The District's staff currently consists of 95 employees in five departments: Administration, Real Property, Public Affairs, Planning, and Operations. The majority of the District staff is in Operations. Currently there are 22 rangers appointed as peace officers responsible for patrol, maintenance, and visitor contact in the preserves and 22 maintenance staff responsible for maintenance and improvement projects. Seasonal staff is also hired to assist with maintenance projects. Staff resources are reviewed on an annual basis during preparation of the District's action plan and budget for the ensuing fiscal year.

17.4 FINANCE

As shown in Table 17.A, the District's revenue is largely from property taxes and grants. Property tax revenue amounts to approximately 1.7 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. The Board of Directors adopted the District's budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2006–2007 on March 22, 2006. This budget assumes lower growth in underlying property tax revenue (approximately 5 percent) due to slower turnover of residential property in both the Santa Clara and San Mateo County portions of the District. The District receives approximately two-thirds of its tax revenue from Santa Clara County and one-third from San Mateo County.

Table 17.A: Sources and Uses of District Funds, FY 2006–2007

Sources of Funds	Revenue
Property tax revenues	\$21,887,000
Grant income	\$5,392,000
Interest income	\$1,300,000
Property management: rental income	\$825,000
Other income	\$200,000
Total Revenues	\$29,604,000

Uses of Funds	Expenses
Debt Service	\$7,162,230
Salaries and Benefits	\$7,891,391
Service and Supplies	\$3,253,199
Fixed Assets	\$33,023,500
Total Expenditures	\$53,330,320

Source: Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Adopted Budget FY 2006–2007

Table 17.B provides the District’s revenues and expenditures for 2005 and 2006. As shown, the District’s revenues have exceeded expenditures.

Table 17.B: District Revenues and Expenditures

	2006	2005
Revenues	\$31,793,933	\$22,917,554
Expenses	\$17,037,053	\$15,825,954
Change in Net Assets	\$14,756,880	\$7,091,600

Source: Annual Financial Report, March 31, 2006

District Debt

As of March 31, 2006, the District’s long-term liabilities consist of \$0.9 million in compensated absences; \$2.0 million of subordinated notes issued to sellers in District land purchase transactions; \$107.1 million of authority revenue bonds sold to the public in 1996, 1999, and 2004; \$4.6 million of refunding promissory notes sold to the public in 2005; and \$16.3 million of accreted interest, unamortized premium, and unamortized loss on refunding. The District is rated AAA by Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s.

Investments

The District’s investment policy, consistent with the Government Code of California, authorizes the District to invest in the County of Santa Clara Treasurer’s investment pool, obligations of the United States Treasury or its agencies, certificates of deposit, bankers’ acceptances, guaranteed and bank investment contracts, commercial paper, and mutual funds invested in United States Government securities.

Cost Savings

The District is a member of the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority. The purpose of the Authority is to arrange and administer programs for the pooling of self-insurance losses, to purchase excess insurance or reinsurance, and to arrange for group-purchased insurance for property and other coverages.

17.5 PRESERVES

The District's 26 preserves range from 55 to nearly 17,000 acres; 24 of these are open to the public free of charge, 365 days a year, from dawn until one-half hour after sunset. Open space preserves are generally kept in a natural condition in order to best protect the environment and wildlife habitat and are developed with only the amenities needed to provide low-intensity recreation. Improvements may include gravel parking areas; restrooms; signed trails for hiking, bicycling, and equestrian and dog use; and an occasional picnic table. There are no infrastructure needs or deficiencies related to the service of the District. Properties the District acquires and/or manages have few, or very limited, existing improvements or needs for infrastructure. Table 17.C provides a list of the name of preserves, locations, amenities, and acreages.

Shared Facilities

The District works with other public recreation and open space providers, conservation agencies, nonprofit land trusts, and community organizations for the preservation and management of open space resources that are regionally significant. District participation could include partial financing for land acquisition; temporary receivership or property; coordination of technical planning and legal services relating to open space issues; joint grant proposals; cosponsorship and participation in demonstration projects; and joint open space resource management. Table 17.D lists the District's shared facilities.

There is no opportunity to consolidate or reorganize any combination of the service providers listed in Table 17.D because they are distinctly different types of organizations, each individual provider is organized under different enabling legislation from that of the District, and each provides distinctly different types and ranges of open space and recreational services. Moreover, the District provides a unique set of services that are complementary to those provided by other service providers. Finally, the District's service fills a gap in the need for open space protection, passive recreation opportunities, and open space management services that other agencies do not have the capacity to provide.

Table 17.C: MROSD Preserves

Preserve	County	Amenities	Acreage
Bear Creek Redwoods	Santa Clara Santa Cruz	43 miles of trail. Public access for hiking and horseback riding in designated areas is available by permit only.	1,343
Coal Creek	San Mateo Santa Clara	5 miles of trails, including a historic trail. The preserve's 5 miles of trails provide important trail connections between Skyline Boulevard and Alpine Road for hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.	493
El Corte de Madera Creek	San Mateo	36 miles of multiuse trail are available for exploration at this 2,821-acre preserve. While this preserve is popular with bicyclists, it also has lots of hiking and horseback riding opportunities.	2,817
El Sereno	Santa Clara	The preserve's nearly 6 miles of wide, gradual trails are open to hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. A 3-mile trek along the ridge offers visitors spectacular panoramic views of Lexington Reservoir, Sierra Azul and St. Joseph's Hill Open Space Preserves, and the South Bay.	1,412
Foothills	Santa Clara	A grassy ridgetop surrounded by steep chaparral-covered slopes, with oak-madrone woodland in the ravines and on the north-facing slopes. A 0.5-mile trail leads from Page Mill Road to a grassy knoll, offering a view of the South Bay.	211
Fremont Older	Santa Clara	This preserve offers a variety of experiences to hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians: open hayfields, Seven Springs Canyon, and Hunters Point, a 900-foot hilltop offering sweeping views of the Santa Clara Valley.	739
La Honda Creek	San Mateo	A special permit is required to access this preserve. Open to equestrians and hikers.	2,078
Loma Ridge	San Mateo Santa Cruz	Open to hikers, cyclists, and equestrians. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Runs through the preserve, connecting Long Ridge with Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve. This portion of the Ridge Trail is one of the longest continuous segments (13 miles), extending from Sanborn-Skyline County Park to the northern boundary of Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve.	1,985
Los Trancos	San Mateo Santa Clara	Visitors will find rolling grassland knolls alternating with oak woodland and cool shaded forest. Located in the Santa Cruz Mountains above Palo Alto, this is an ideal spot to learn about earthquake geology. There is a 1.5-mile self-guided tour the San Andreas Fault Trail.	274
Mills Creek		Public access is currently limited pending trail planning and development	TBD
Monte Bello	Santa Clara San Mateo	Approximately 15 miles of trails are available to explore. For example, the Stevens Creek Nature Trail, with a self-guided 3-mile loop with interpretation, descends into the forested canyon,	2,943

Preserve	County	Amenities	Acreage
		continues along the creek, and heads back up through grasslands.	
Picchetti Ranch	Santa Clara	Winery built in the late 1890s and operated for many years under the Picchetti Brothers label. The District purchased the winery, homestead, and surrounding property in 1976.	308
Pulgas Ridge	San Mateo	An easy-access “connector” trail links the preserve’s parking area with the 0.8-mile Cordilleras Trail, which is designed to accommodate wheelchairs, strollers, or visitors desiring a less strenuous open space experience.	366
Purisima Creek Redwoods	San Mateo	21 miles of developed trails and historical logging roads provide opportunities for easy walks or long, strenuous hikes or rides.	3,110
Ranch San Antonio	Santa Clara	This Preserve, combined with the adjoining 165-acre County Park, offers visitors a unique experience with a sampling of diverse environments, interesting cultural history, and a variety of activities. The most popular activities are jogging and hiking. Stretching bars are available at the restroom parking area and equestrian staging area. The park provides hiking, bicycling, and equestrian trails, which connect with additional trails within the Open Space Preserve.	3,800
Ravenswood	San Mateo	Comprised of two noncontiguous areas located south of the Dumbarton Bridge and adjacent to San Francisco Bay. The marsh attracts a variety of migrating birds, including sandpipers, dowitchers, and avocets. Great blue herons, white pelicans, and egrets are also common. Public access improvements include a bicycle and pedestrian trail along the levee surrounding the marsh, a 12-car parking lot, and two observation decks. The trail and observation decks are wheelchair-accessible.	373
Russian Ridge	San Mateo Santa Clara	Eight miles of trails are available at Russian Ridge. The Bay Area Ridge Trail continues north from Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve along the ridge to Rapley Ranch Road, providing views of both the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay.	1,822
St. Joseph’s Hill	Santa Clara	St. Joseph’s Hill is a popular destination, offering trails that will challenge hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.	268
Saratoga Gap	Santa Clara Santa Cruz	2-mile multiuse Saratoga Gap Trail provides opportunities for bikers, cyclists, and equestrians.	1,291
Sierra Azul	Santa Clara Santa Cruz	The environment of Sierra Azul is strikingly varied. One can visit serpentine grasslands, hard, rocky, and steep chaparral, dense stands of bay trees, or quiet, shaded oak woodland forests. For the more experienced explorers, there are deep ravines and riparian corridors, some containing seasonal or year-round water flow.	16,879

Preserve	County	Amenities	Acreage
Skyline Ridge	San Mateo Santa Clara	Offers 10 miles of trail for exploration. Two 1-mile trails are accessible to wheelchairs and baby strollers: one encircling Alpine Pond and another hugging the shores of Horseshoe Lake. Several picnic tables overlook Horseshoe Lake. Views of the Lambert Creek watershed, Butano Ridge, and Portola State Park will impress the hiker who makes this trek.	2,143
Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Study Area	Santa Clara	Offers a 0.5-mile trail where visitors may spot pied-billed grebes, great blue herons, coots, and shovelers. The lucky birder may even spot a clapper rail or a salt marsh harvest mouse, two endangered species that depend on this sensitive habitat to survive.	55
Teague Hill	San Mateo	Private Property and California Water Service Company Property make it difficult to visit the majority of Teague Hill. Currently, there is only one designated trail that touches Teague Hill Preserve, and there are no plans in the near future to create additional designated trails.	626
Thornewood	San Mateo	The preserve's 0.75-mile trail gradually winds through sunlit canopies of big-leaf maples and moss-covered oaks and ends under the shade of the giant redwoods that surround Schilling Lake. Schilling Lake is an excellent site to view waterfowl during their migration.	163
Windy Hill	San Mateo	Visitors can meander through a variety of habitats along the preserve's 13 miles of trails. Hikers and equestrians use the Hamms Gulch, Eagle, Razorback Ridge, and Lost Trails to make an 8-mile loop through forested ridges to the valley floor and back again. The Anniversary Trail provides a short hike atop Windy Hill, with views of the bay and surrounding valley. Popular among bicyclists is the Spring Ridge Trail, which descends from Skyline Boulevard and continues along a grassy ridge to Portola Valley. Windy Hill is an ideal spot for kite flying. Hang gliding, paragliding, and remote control gliding are allowed by obtaining a special permit.	1,306
Total			46,805

Table 17.D: MROSD Shared Facilities

Preserve/Park	County	Agency/District	Acres	Shared Facility/Agreement
Edgewood County Park	San Mateo	County of San Mateo	468.00	Conservation easement
Monte Bello	Santa Clara	City of Palo Alto	85.37	Management agreement
Rancho San Antonio	Santa Clara	County of Santa Clara	165.00	Management agreement
Ravenswood	San Mateo	State Lands Commission	98.00	Conservation easement
Saratoga Gap	Santa Clara	Saratoga Unified School District	2.10	Conservation easement
Stevens Creek Shoreline	Santa Clara	Santa Clara Valley Water District	1.00	Road easement
Deer Hollow Farm at Rancho San Antonio	Santa Clara	City of Mountain View & County of Santa Clara	N/A	Management agreement
Jacques Ridge (Almaden/Quicksilver County Park & Sierra Azul)	Santa Clara	County of Santa Clara & MROSD	900.00	Conservation easement
Hacienda Park (Sierra Azul)	Santa Clara	County of Santa Clara	130.00	Conservation easement
Golden Gate National Recreation Area*	San Mateo	San Mateo	1,227.26	Co-ownership*
Pulgas Ridge	San Mateo	City & County of San Francisco	N/A	Revocable trail permit
Moody Gulch (Sierra Azul)	Santa Clara	County of Santa Clara	160.00	Conservation easement
Long Ridge	Santa Cruz	California State Parks	N/A	Encroachment permit for shared trailhead

Source: San Mateo LAFCO Service Review and Sphere of Influence Information, December 2003

17.6 SERVICE REVIEW DETERMINATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT

The service review guidelines prepared by the State Office of Planning and Research recommend that issues relevant to the jurisdiction be addressed through written determinations called for in the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 1985 (CKH Act). Based on the above information, following are the written determinations for the District.

Infrastructure Needs and Deficiencies

1. There are no infrastructure needs or deficiencies related to the services of the District. Properties the District acquires and/or manages have few, or very limited, existing improvements or needs for infrastructure.

Growth and Population

1. Based on Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) projections, the County is expected to experience a moderate growth rate of 1.19 percent annually through 2025. The District's service provision is not directly related to population growth. However, population growth could increase development pressure on nonpreserved open space lands, making the District's acquisition of these areas more difficult.

Financing Constraints and Opportunities

1. The District's financing is largely gained from property tax revenue and grant income. The District's revenues have been exceeding expenses, the District is rated AAA by Moody's and Standard and Poor's, and no financing constraints appear to exist.

Cost-Avoidance Opportunities

1. The District is a member of the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority. This membership provides cost savings related to insurance services.
2. The District's pursuit of grant funding provides cost savings.

Opportunities for Rate Restructuring

1. The District does not levy rates for services. Hence, no opportunities for rate restructuring have been identified.

Opportunities for Shared Facilities

1. The District explores and engages in joint projects to maximize the opportunities for preservation of open space. Currently, the District has numerous shared facilities.

Government Structure Options

1. There is no opportunity to consolidate or reorganize any combination of open space service providers located within the District's boundary because the District provides a unique set of services that are complementary to those provided by other service providers, and the District's service fills a gap in the need for open space protection, passive recreation opportunities, and open space management services that other agencies do not have the capacity to provide.

Evaluation of Management Efficiencies

1. The District's cooperative projects with other agencies provide management efficiencies in the provision of open space services.

Local Accountability and Governance

1. The District ensures that local accountability and governance standards are met by holding meetings pursuant to the Brown Act, maintaining a subscriber mailing list, and implementing a Public Notification Policy.

17.7 SOI RECOMMENDATION FOR THE MROSD

Current SOI Boundary

Within Santa Clara County, the District's existing SOI includes all of the County area, except for lands within the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority's SOI. Specifically, the District's SOI is generally coterminous with its boundary, except for the southernmost portion, which includes unincorporated lands. This area is one of only two areas within Santa Clara County that is not included in an open space district; the other area being the City of Gilroy. Within San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties, the District's SOI is coterminous with its boundaries.

SOI Recommendation

Any expansion of the District's SOI within Santa Clara County would overlap with areas of the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority's SOI. Therefore, it is recommended that the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) reaffirm the existing SOI for the District.

17.8 SOI DETERMINATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT

As detailed in Section 1.1, Government Code Section 56425 requires written determinations with respect to the following four factors to update an agency's SOI. Based on the information above, the following determinations are provided to update the District's existing SOI.

- 1. The Present and Planned Land Uses in the Area, including Agricultural and Open-Space Lands**

The District encompasses the Cities of Palo Alto, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Cupertino, Saratoga, Monte Sereno, Los Gatos, as well as the unincorporated area of the County that is not within the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority. These areas contain a wide range of land uses, including all types of urban uses to large areas of hillside, open space, and agricultural uses. Generally, unincorporated areas within the County are designated Rural County. However, numerous unincorporated pocket areas exist that are developed with urban uses. Development within the cities ranges from fully developed urban areas to expansive hillside, open space, and agricultural lands.

Finding: Planned land uses throughout these areas are generally similar to those of the existing uses.

2. Present and Probable Need for Public Facilities and Services in the Area

The County is expected to experience a moderate growth rate of 1.19 percent annually through 2025. The District's service provision is not directly related to population growth. However, population growth could increase development pressure on nonpreserved open space lands, making the District's acquisition of these areas more difficult.

Finding: The District is expected to continue to acquire lands for open space preservation throughout its boundary.

3. Present Capacity of Public Facilities and Adequacy of Public Services that the Agency Provides or is Authorized to Provide

Finding: The present capacity of service provided by the Open Space District appears to be adequate.

4. Existence of Any Social or Economic Communities of Interest in the Area if the Commission Determines that they are Relevant to the Agency

Due to the unique service that the District provides, all lands within the District's boundary could be considered a community of interest. Specifically, nonpreserved open space areas that are of regional significance would be considered communities of interest.

Finding: All lands within the District's boundary are considered communities of interest.