



Parks and Recreation Commission Staff Report

From: Public Works Department

Meeting Date: October 28, 2025

Report #: 2510-5288

TITLE

Review and Discussion of Foothills Nature Preserve Improvements Project Scope Reduction

RECOMMENDATION

Review and provide feedback on the Foothills Nature Preserve Improvements Project Scope Reduction

BACKGROUND

Foothills Nature Preserve, approximately 1,400 acres of open space provides a wide variety of outdoor activities to the community. The Preserve was opened to the general public in 2020 which resulted in a significant increase in visitation between 2020 through 2024 from historic 15-year average of 175,000 to up to an average of 221,000 visitors per year. Between 2020 through 2024 the visitation surge necessitated many safety, access, and infrastructure improvements within the preserve.

Staff conducted several meetings with Foothills stakeholders, the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) Open Space liaisons, and a PRC meeting as listed below to discuss preliminary improvements needed at the preserve including pedestrian pathways, parking, curbs, fencing, crosswalks, speed humps, signage, bike parking, and new seating.

- March 5 and 10, 2021 and August 11, 2023: The stakeholder group established support for adding a new pedestrian pathway adjacent to the preserve road to provide a safe place for visitors, renovating and improving the parking at Vista Hill and Boronda Lake to make it safe and efficient for the increased number of vehicles, and removing roadside parking in areas where the preserve road is too narrow.
- August 14, 2023: PRC Open Space liaisons reviewed the preliminary improvement plans.

- August 22, 2023¹: Staff presented the preliminary improvement plans to the PRC.

After receiving support for the preliminary improvement plan from the stakeholders and PRC, staff issued a Request for Proposals for professional engineering services and on April 15, 2024, Council approved a professional services contract² with BKF Engineers to provide design and construction administration services for the project. Staff received minor Architectural Review Board conditional approval for the project in February 2025. The proposed improvement plan was refined to incorporate ARB comments, field conditions, and staff input.

On June 4, 2025, staff met with PRC Open Space liaisons onsite to review the updated improvement plans. The liaisons provided feedback regarding reducing the proposed pathways widths, preserving trees, parking improvements, and prioritizing a natural appearance within the preserve.

On September 8, 2025, the City Council discussed the need and reducing the scope as part of the fiscal year 2026 budget amendments review. The City Council referred the project to PRC and directed staff to return with potential reductions in scope and funding as part of the fiscal year 2026 Mid-Year Budget review. Although the number of visitors to the preserve is now comparable to the pre-pandemic historic average, the Rangers still observe continuous safety issues. Staff attribute this trend to a shift in the visitor profile, with more first-time or infrequent visitors who are unfamiliar with the Preserve rules, parking, particularly during the weekends and holidays.

ANALYSIS

Since the City Council direction, staff prioritized and reduced the project scope to safety improvements along preserve's road and access improvements around Boronda Lake and Vista Hill, which are generally the higher traffic areas.

On October 7, 2025, staff met with the PRC Open Space liaisons to review the reduced scope. The liaisons generally supported the reduced scope and provided feedback to evaluate the need for a new asphalt parking lot across Boronda Lake and to reduce existing asphalt surfacing at Vista Hill while reconfiguring parking. The liaisons also supported exploring pedestrian access improvements near Orchard Glen picnic area. Staff refined the improvement plan based on the

¹ Parks and Recreation Commission, August 22, 2023; Agenda Item #3
<https://www.paloalto.gov/files/assets/public/v/1/public-works/engineering-services/parks-and-recreation-commission-staff-report-foothills-draft-improvement-project-8-22-23-final.pdf>

² City Council, April 15, 2024; Agenda Item #7; CMR # 2402-2583
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=93365&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=b9df8df9-1001-4ce2-9742-c8764140e495>

feedback received from the liaisons. The proposed reduced scope is included in Attachment A and is described below.

1. Pedestrian pathways:

- a. New designated pedestrian pathways along preserve roads connecting entrance, Boronda Lake and Vista Hill. Pathways will be about three to four feet wide and constructed of quarry fines material. Quarry fines is a mixture of fine sand, silt and clay-like material generated as a by-product of quarrying operation. This material has been used at Arastradero Preserve for similar purposes and has performed well. Existing asphalt would be used for pathways at Vista Hill as feasible.
- b. Existing boulders will be utilized as a safety barrier between pedestrians and vehicular traffic where feasible.
- c. New asphalt curb will be added along the edge of the pedestrian pathways as safety barrier where necessary with curb cuts to allow for stormwater flows and wildlife crossing. The curb will also ensure vehicles do not park on pedestrian pathways.
- d. No trees are proposed for removal. Pathways may have gaps where necessary to preserve existing trees.

2. Parking improvements:

- a. Reconfigure existing parking spaces around Vista Hill and Boronda Lake to provide safer and efficient access for vehicles. Some parallel parking spaces will be removed along Boronda Lake and entrance road to accommodate new pathways and provide more consistency with parking patterns in the preserve by prioritizing head-in parking.
- b. No new parking lots will be constructed. The project proposes refreshing the existing parking lots as shown in Attachment A with striping to clearly delineate parking stalls. This will maintain natural appearance and enhance visitors' experience.
- c. Per PRC Open Space liaisons input and upon revisiting parking in each of the improvement areas, staff has removed the new parking lot across from Boronda Lake. The visitors will be able to use the overflow parking lot when needed and may walk to the lake via the new pathway through the Y-connection.
- d. Reconfiguration of the existing asphalt parking on the western side of Vista Hill, and renaturalize by removing asphalt that is not necessary.

Prior to opening the preserve to the general public, there were approximately 485 and reserved parking spaces in the preserve and no more than 1,000 people permitted at any one time. The proposed scope would streamline parking near entrance, Boronda Lake, and Vista Hill areas. No change in parking is included in the reduced scope between Boronda Lake and Oak Grove picnic areas. The proposed plan would result in total unreserved parking within the preserve to be approximately 275 spaces. Per Muni Code 22.04.150, no more than 600 people shall

be permitted in Foothills Nature Preserve at any one time.

3. Traffic Control:
 - a. Speed humps will be added throughout the preserve roads where necessary to slow down traffic and prevent speeding.
 - b. Crosswalks will be added for additional safety where pedestrian pathways cross the road or at trail connections.
 - c. Signage and striping will be added to provide traffic guidance and minimize confusion.
 - d. Tiger teeth will be added at the intersection south of Vista Hill to enforce one-way traffic.
 - e. A designated hatch-striped turnaround zone will be added to the existing parking area near Boronda Lake to allow for vehicles to safely turn around in this area.
 - f. Stop signs will be added where needed.
4. Add two new benches along the Vista Hill viewpoint.

The improvements that were in the original preliminary plan in 2023 and are now eliminated or further refined to develop the reduced scope include:

1. The original plan included up to 6 feet wide new pedestrian pathways along preserve roads from entrance to Interpretive Center and from Boronda Lake to Vista Hill. The proposed plan has been revised by reducing pathway widths to 3 to 4 feet and eliminating new pathways from Boronda Lake to Interpretive Center.
2. The existing boulders will be utilized where feasible instead of curb along the entire stretch of pathways. Only the areas where existing boulders are not available or feasible will have asphalt curb.
3. The new trail connecting the Boronda Lake overflow parking to the lake through sensitive area has been removed to eliminate impacts on sensitive habitats.
4. New asphalt parking across Boronda Lake has been eliminated.
5. Bus parking at Vista Hill has been removed.
6. Bike racks were installed by staff at Boronda Lake, Orchard Glen and Interpretive Center. Additional bike racks will be installed in spring 2026.
7. Park Rangers have installed new split rail fencing where necessary to protect natural resources and due to safety concerns.

Cost Estimate

Based on the conceptual cost analysis, the preliminary construction cost is approximately \$300,000 for the proposed reduced scope which is 30-35% less than the original improvement plan scope. A detailed cost estimate will be prepared during design phase to further refine the cost estimate.

Environmental Review

The proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (minor improvements to existing facilities).

Next Steps

Staff will update the City Council for mid-year budget adjustments based on the PRC's feedback on the proposed reduced scope. Staff will return to the PRC for a Park Improvements Ordinance (PIO) recommendation to the City Council. Staff anticipates completing design in spring 2026 and bidding and construction in summer/fall 2026.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

Funding for this CIP is available in Fiscal Year 2026 Adopted Capital Improvement Program Foothills Nature Preserve Improvements (PE-21000).

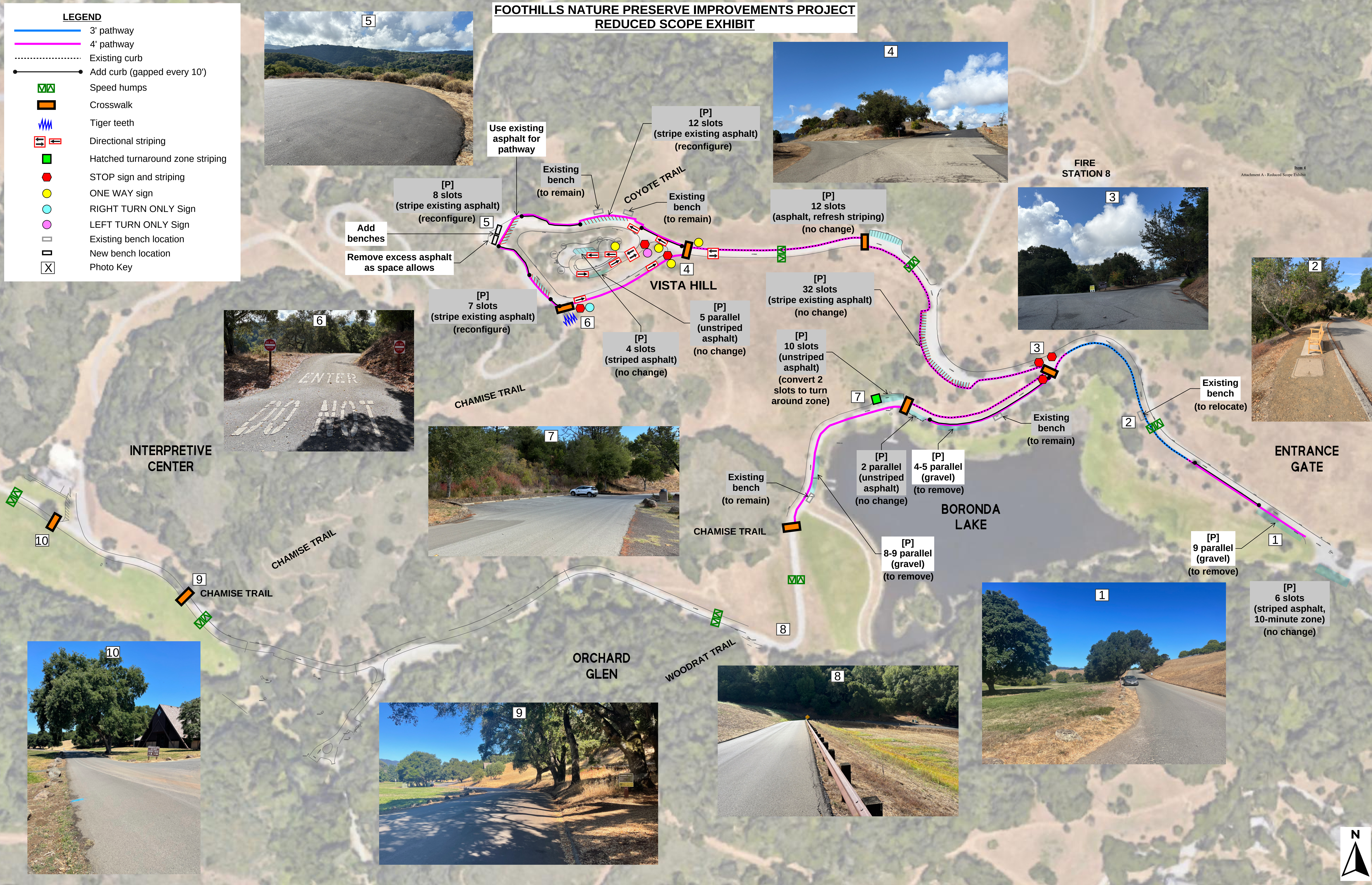
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Foothills Nature Preserve Improvements Project Reduced Scope Exhibit.

LEGEND

- 3' pathway
- 4' pathway
- Existing curb
- Add curb (gapped every 10')
- Speed humps
- Crosswalk
- Tiger teeth
- Directional striping
- Hatched turnaround zone striping
- STOP sign and striping
- ONE WAY sign
- RIGHT TURN ONLY Sign
- LEFT TURN ONLY Sign
- Existing bench location
- New bench location
- Photo Key

FOOTHILLS NATURE PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT REDUCED SCOPE EXHIBIT





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Parks and Recreation Commission At Places Memo

Lead Department: Community Services

Meeting Date: October 28, 2025

Item Number: 4

Report #:2510-5369

TITLE

Review and provide feedback on the Foothills Nature Preserve Improvements Project Scope Reduction

ANALYSIS

Item No. 2 Parking Improvements

Staff would like to clarify that parking in Foothills Nature Preserve was reduced to its current level of approximately 375 parking spaces (292 unreserved and 83 reserved) between December 2020 and March 2021 in response to parking challenges and safety concerns as well as due to reduction in number of visitors from 1,000 to 600 visitors at a given time per Muni Code 22.04.150. The proposed reduced scope plan would remove approximately 25 unreserved parking spaces resulting in a total of approximately 350 parking spaces (267 unreserved and 83 reserved).



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FOOTHILLS NATURE PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS

*Parks and Recreation
Commission*

OCTOBER 28, 2025

OVERVIEW

- Background
- Project Scope
 - Original Concept Improvement Plan (2023)
 - Reduced Scope Concept Improvement Plan
- Items Reduced/Removed from Scope
- Preliminary Cost Estimate
- Project Timeline and Next Steps

BACKGROUND

- Foothills Nature Preserve opened to the general public in 2020.
- Visitation increased from historic average of 175,000 to 221,000 visitors per year between 2020 and 2024.
- Impacts of increased visitation:
 - Visitors walking off-trail into sensitive areas.
 - Safety concerns due to pedestrians sharing preserve roads.
 - Confusion due to lack of signage and unmarked parking areas.
 - Traffic violations.
- March 2021/August 2023: Stakeholders meetings.
- August 2023: PRC open space liaisons and PRC meetings.

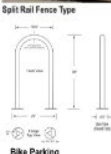
ORIGINAL DRAFT IMPROVEMENT PLAN (2023)

Pathway and Parking Area Improvement Plan

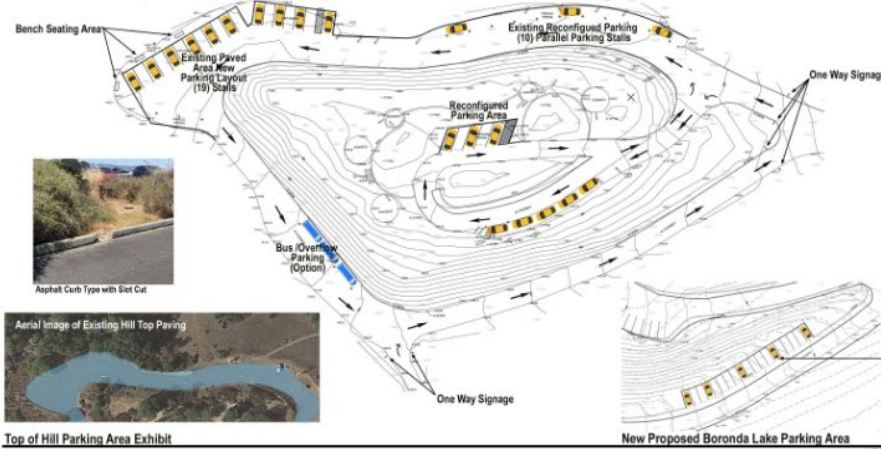
Legend



Photos of Existing Site Conditions



Pathway and Parking Area Improvement Exhibit

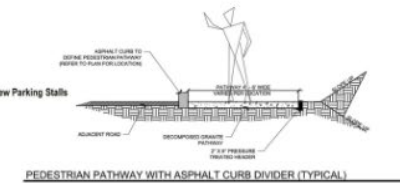
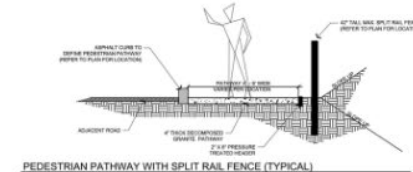
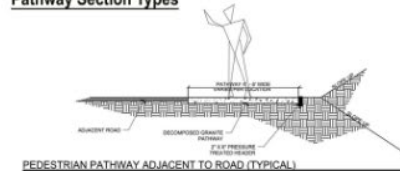


Top of Hill Parking Area Exhibit



Slope Pathway Route Exhibit - Path to be Laid Out in Field N.T.S.

Pathway Section Types



Foothills Nature Preserve - 11799 Page Mill Rd, Los Altos Hills, CA 94022

DATE: 6.7.23

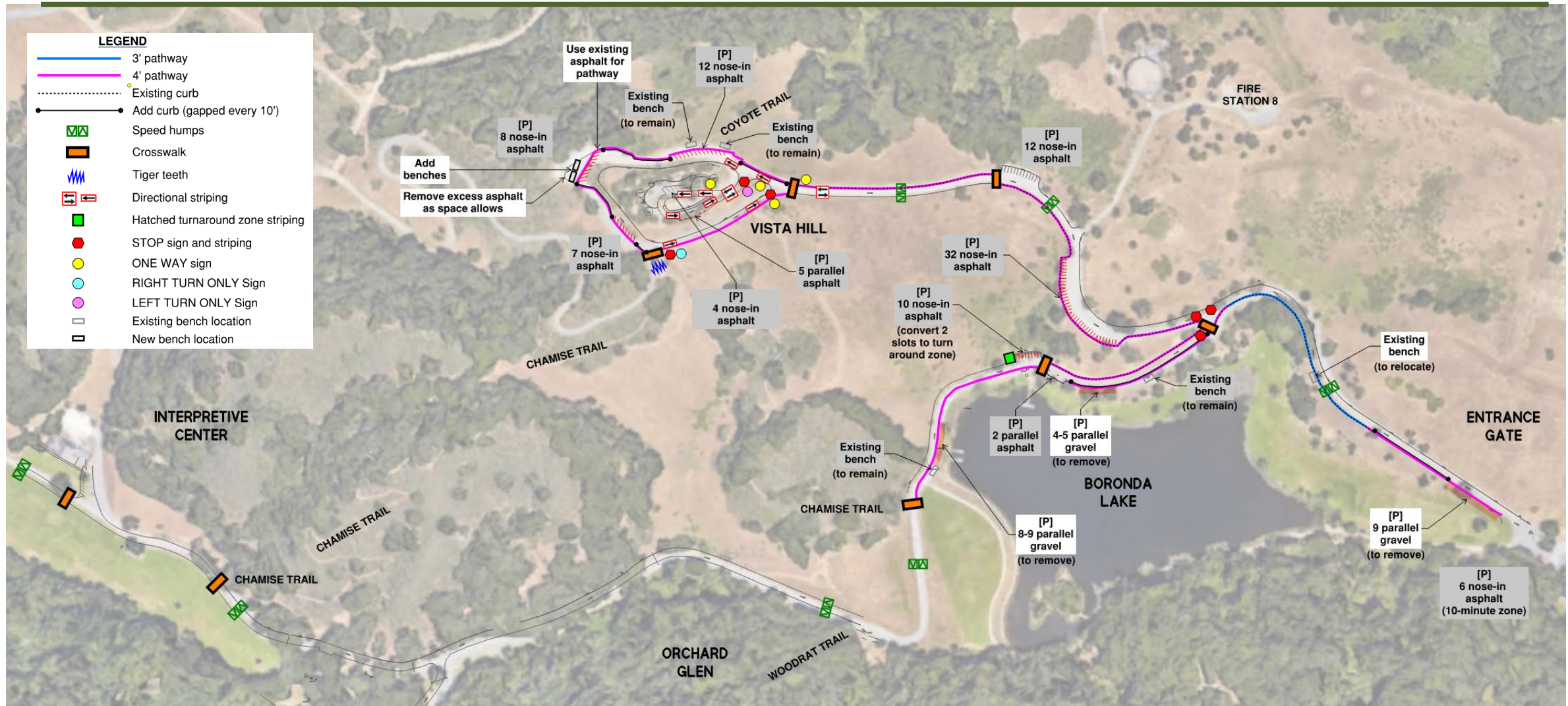
SCOPE REFINEMENTS

- April 15, 2024: Council approved a design services contract.
- February 2025: Minor ARB Conditional Approval.
- June 4, 2025: PRC open space liaisons feedback – pathway widths, trees preservation, and parking.
- September 8, 2025: Council referred the project to PRC for potential scope reductions during FY 2026 budget amendments.
- Staff prioritized improvements in higher use areas to reduce scope.
- October 7, 2025: PRC open space liaisons feedback on the reduced scope – remove excess asphalt at Vista Hill and remove/revisit parking across Boronda Lake.

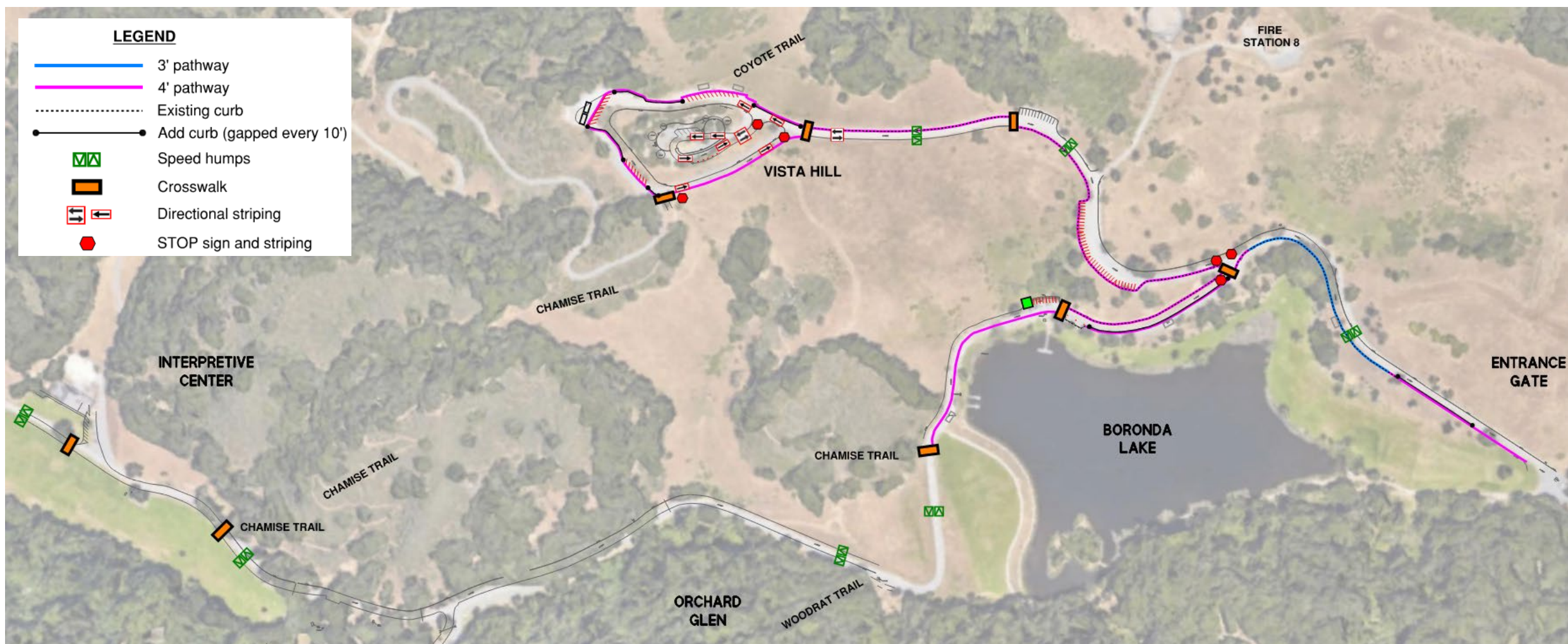
PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS (REDUCED SCOPE)

- Create designated pedestrian pathways along preserve roads from Entrance to Boronda Lake and Vista Hill.
- Add curb along the pedestrian pathways or utilize existing boulders where feasible.
- Add traffic control features:
 - Crosswalks
 - Speed humps
 - Tiger teeth spikes at Vista Hill
 - Turn-around zone
 - Signage and striping
 - Stop Signs
- Reconfigure and remove some existing parking.
- Add benches at Vista Hill viewpoint.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT PLAN (REDUCED SCOPE)



DESIGNATED PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS



DESIGNATED PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS

- 3- or 4-feet wide pathways.
- Quarry fines material.
- Utilize existing boulders as safety barrier where feasible.
- Asphalt curb to provide a safety barrier where existing boulders are not feasible.
- No tree removals, gaps in pathway where necessary.

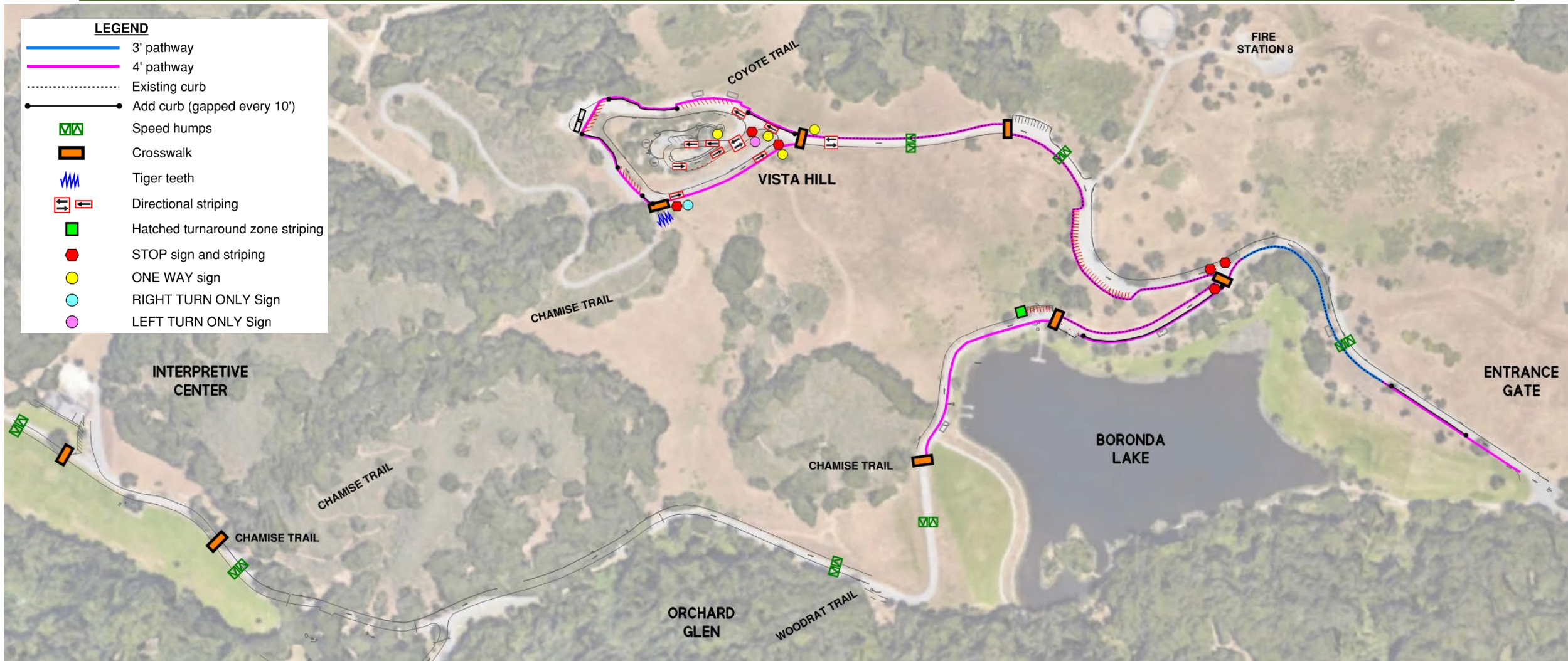


Quarry Fines at Arastradero Preserve



Gapped Curb at Baylands Nature Preserve

TRAFFIC CONTROL FEATURES



CROSSWALKS

Crosswalks will be added where pedestrian pathways cross the road to increase safety.



EXISTING



PROPOSED



SPEED HUMPS

- Speed humps will be added to slow down traffic and prevent speeding.



TIGER TEETH SPIKES AT VISTA HILL

Tiger teeth spikes to enforce one-way traffic at intersection south of Vista Hill

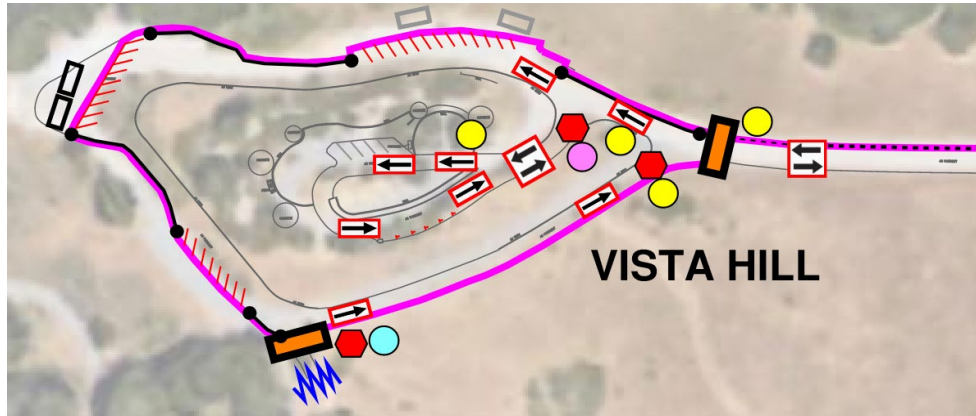


TURNAROUND ZONE AT BORONDA LAKE

Add a designated hatch-striped turnaround zone near Boronda Lake.

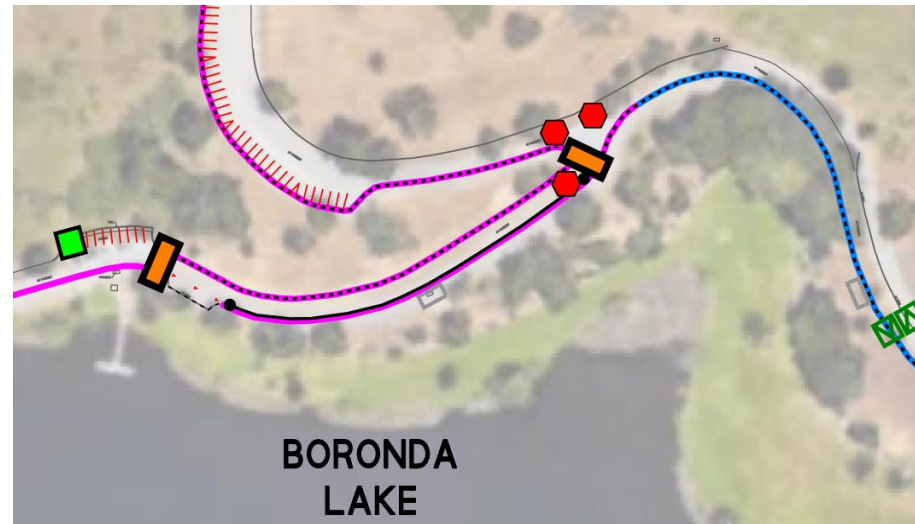


STOP SIGNS, SIGNAGE, AND BENCHES

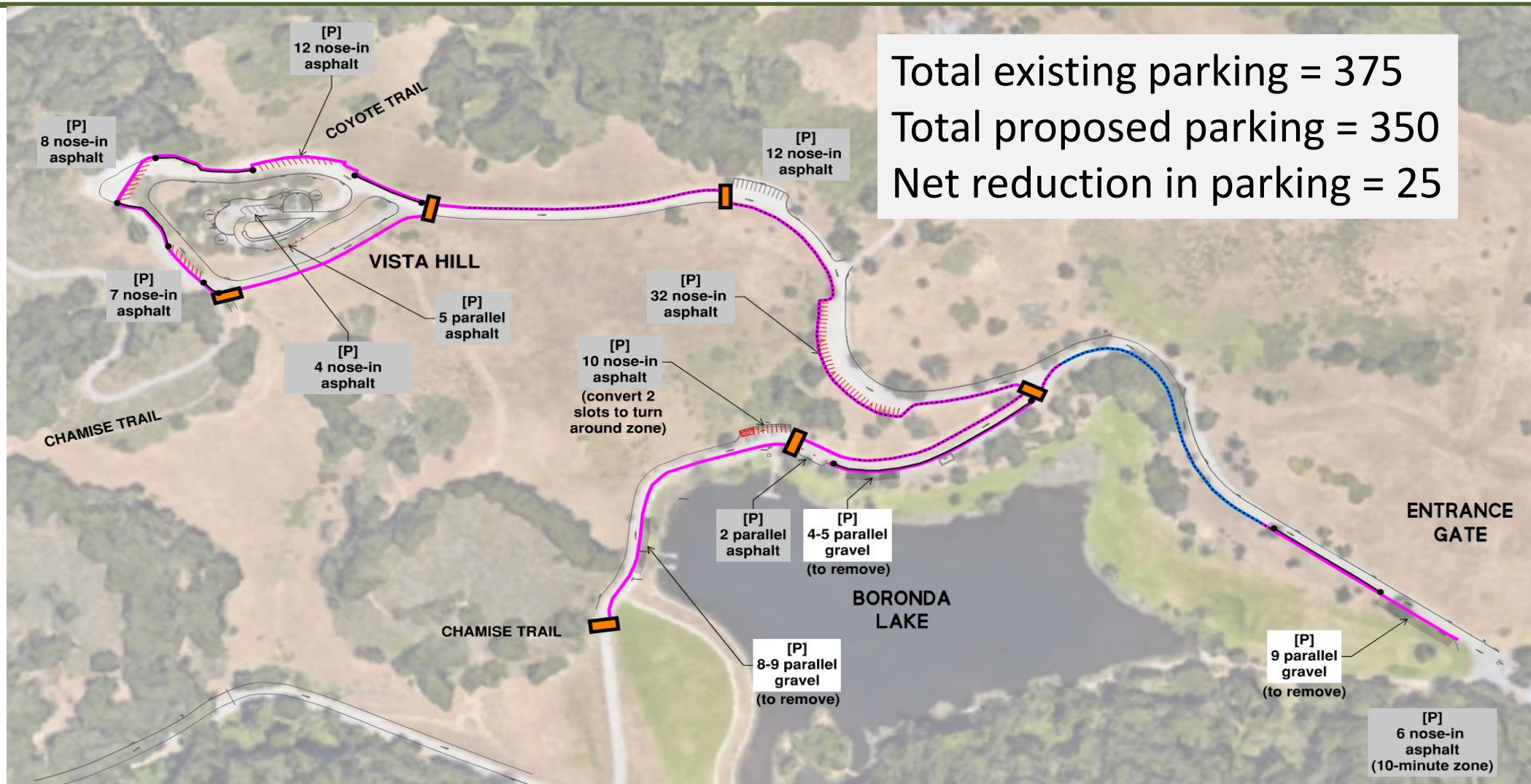


LEGEND

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- Crosswalk
- ⚡ Tiger teeth
- ⇄ Directional striping
- Hatched turnaround zone striping
- ⬢ STOP sign and striping
- ONE WAY sign
- RIGHT TURN ONLY Sign
- LEFT TURN ONLY Sign
- Existing bench location
- New bench location



PARKING IMPROVEMENTS



RECONFIGURE EXISTING PARKING

- No new hardscaped parking lots.
- Parking reconfiguration with striping at Vista Hill and Boronda Lake areas.
 - Traffic flow and efficiency
 - Clearly delineate parking
 - Removal of excess asphalt surfacing at Vista Hill



REMOVE PARKING

Some parallel parking will be removed to accommodate new pathways and to provide safer and efficient space.



ITEMS REDUCED/REMOVED FROM ORIGINAL SCOPE

REDUCED

- Pedestrian pathway width reduced from 6 feet to 3 and 4 feet.
- Existing boulders to be used as safety barriers. Asphalt curb to be installed only in areas where boulders are not feasible.

REMOVED

- Pedestrian pathway from Boronda Lake dam to Interpretive Center.
- Trail connecting overflow parking to Boronda Lake through sensitive habitat.
- Bus parking at Vista Hill.
- New asphalt parking lot across Boronda Lake.
- Addressed by staff: Bike racks at Boronda Lake, Orchard Glen and Interpretive Center; split rail fence

PRELIMINARY COST ESTIMATE

- The conceptual construction cost estimate for reduced scope is approximately \$300k (30-35% less than the 2023 concept improvements plan (\$450k).
- Cost estimate will be refined during design.

PROJECT TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

- Minor Architectural Review Conditional Approval (February 2025)
- PRC Review of Reduced Scope (October 28, 2025)
- Construction Documents (Winter 2026)
- PRC Recommendation for Park Improvement Ordinance (PIO) (Winter 2026)
- Council adoption of PIO (Spring 2026)
- Contractor Bidding (Spring/Summer 2026)
- Council Award for Construction Contract (Summer 2026)
- Construction (Fall 2026)

Questions and Comments



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