



# FAIRFAX TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

## STAFF REPORT

**MEETING DATE** September 4, 2024

**PREPARED FOR** Mayor and Town Council

**PREPARED BY** Jeffrey Beiswenger, AICP, Planning and Building Services Director

**SUBJECT** Consider submitting a letter recommending to Bay Area Metro, Metropolitan Transportation Commission / Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC / ABAG) the establishment of three Priority Conservation Area within the Fairfax area.

---

### RECOMMENDATION

Submit a letter recommending that the Bay Area Metro, Metropolitan Transportation Commission / Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC / ABAG) establish three Priority Conservation Areas within the Fairfax area.

### BACKGROUND

Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) were conceived by MTC / ABAG as part of a planning framework established in 2007 as a way of recognizing areas with significant natural amenities and/or regional recreational potential (e.g. trails). PCAs were nominated through a voluntary, locally-driven process. In the case of Fairfax, the Fairfax Open Space Committee (FOSC) played a critical role in identifying PCAs which were then designated by the ABAG Executive Board. One advantage of the PCA designation is the potential availability of grant funds. MTC and the State Coastal Conservancy have programmed over \$30 million in grants to support PCA projects in the region since 2013.

The PCA refresh process was launched by MTC / ABAG in early 2022 and one of the objectives of the process was to develop accurate PCA boundaries to enable their greater use in regional analysis and planning. When first established, the boundaries were not well defined. Changes to the PCA boundaries have been proposed by representatives of the Fairfax Open Space Committee (FOSC). FOSC has been in contact with MTC / ABAG staff to fine tune the boundaries of three previously established Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). All of the PCAs are either within the town limits of Fairfax, or immediately adjacent to Fairfax and within the designated planning area.

The three Fairfax PCA's are:

1. PCA Code MR 19: Western Fairfax/Tamarancho/Cascade (Fairfax Zone 1);
2. PCA Code MR 20: Southern Fairfax/Bald Hill (Fairfax Zone 2); and
3. PCA Code MR 21: Northern Fairfax/Sleepy Hollow/Oak Manor/Wall (Fairfax Zone 3).

(see Attachment 2: Fairfax Open Space, Priority Conservation Areas)

All of the Fairfax PCAs will be amended from "Natural Land, Urban Greening and Recreation" to "Recreation". Under the refresh process this is the only possible designation since the PCAs are within the urbanized area of Fairfax. Note that these areas are recognized as having significant natural resources: substantial wildlife habitat and corridors, abundant native plant communities and

forests, a wealth of wildlife, including special status species, and spectacular visual value. The designation as Recreation will not limit our ability to apply in the future for MTC/ABAG PCA funds for activities that will restore or enhance these natural resources as well as for funding for recreation-related purposes.

With respect to Fairfax Zone 2, this area requires some minor refinements so that it can qualify as a PCA under the "recreation" criteria. It currently includes the Meadow Club and large portions of this golf course property do not qualify under the PCA criteria. Some adjustments are required so that the PCA contains 75% of land recognized by MTC/ABAG as having appropriate "Recreation" attributes (as currently designated only 68% of the land has the required attributes). In order to achieve the 75% threshold, the majority of the golf course will be removed from the PCA and other adjacent property added. The course is adjacent to Marin Municipal Water District and Marin County, Bald Hill Preserve, both of which already contain a regional trail network that connects through publicly held lands from Fairfax to Mill Valley to the south and to the Pacific Ocean to the west, so it is important that a portion of the golf course will remain in PCA 2 to provide the opportunity to enhance this regional trail system in the future.

The attached letter recommends that MTC adopt the three PCAs and authorizes staff to continue to fine tune Fairfax Zone 2 to meet the 75% threshold as required by MTC.

**ATTACHMENT**

- A. Letter of support for the establishment of three PCAs within or adjacent to the Town of Fairfax
- B. Map of PCAs
- C. Priority Conservation Areas Briefer



# TOWN OF FAIRFAX

142 BOLINAS ROAD, FAIRFAX, CALIFORNIA 94930  
PHONE (415) 453-1584 / FAX (415) 453-1618

September 4, 2024

Michael Germeraad  
Resilience Planner  
Bay Area Metro  
MTC/ABAG

## **Re: Letter of support for the establishment of three Fairfax PCAs**

Dear Michael,

The Town of Fairfax is pleased to support the establishment of three Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). Fairfax previously initiated three existing PCAs and these have been approved by MTC/ABAG. We understand that to bring those PCAs into alignment under the MTC/ABAG Refresh process some amendments to the boundaries and classification are required. These changes have been discussed with representatives of the Fairfax Open Space Committee.

The three Fairfax PCA's are:

1. PCA Code MR 19: Western Fairfax/Tamarancho/Cascade (Fairfax Zone 1);
2. PCA Code MR 20: Southern Fairfax/Bald Hill (Fairfax Zone 2); and
3. PCA Code MR 21: Northern Fairfax/Sleepy Hollow/Oak Manor/Wall (Fairfax Zone 3).

The Town agrees with the MTC/ABAG recommendation that Fairfax Zones are amended to reclassify the PCA type from "Natural Land, Urban Greening and Recreation" to "Recreation" only, since this is the only possible designation under the criteria for lands within a Town boundary. These areas have substantial wildlife habitat and corridors, abundant native plant communities and forests, a wealth of wildlife, including special status species, and spectacular visual value. We understand that the designation as Recreation will not limit our ability to apply for PCA funds for activities that will restore or enhance these natural resources as well as for funding for recreation-related purposes.

With respect to Fairfax Zone 2, some adjustments are required so that it contains 75% of land recognized by MTC/ABAG as having appropriate "Recreation" attributes (as current designated it only 68% of the land has the required attributes). Town staff will continue to work with the Fairfax Open Space Committee to refine the boundary of Zone 2 to meet the 75% threshold.


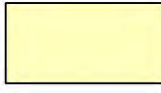

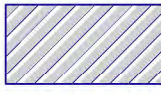




Regards,

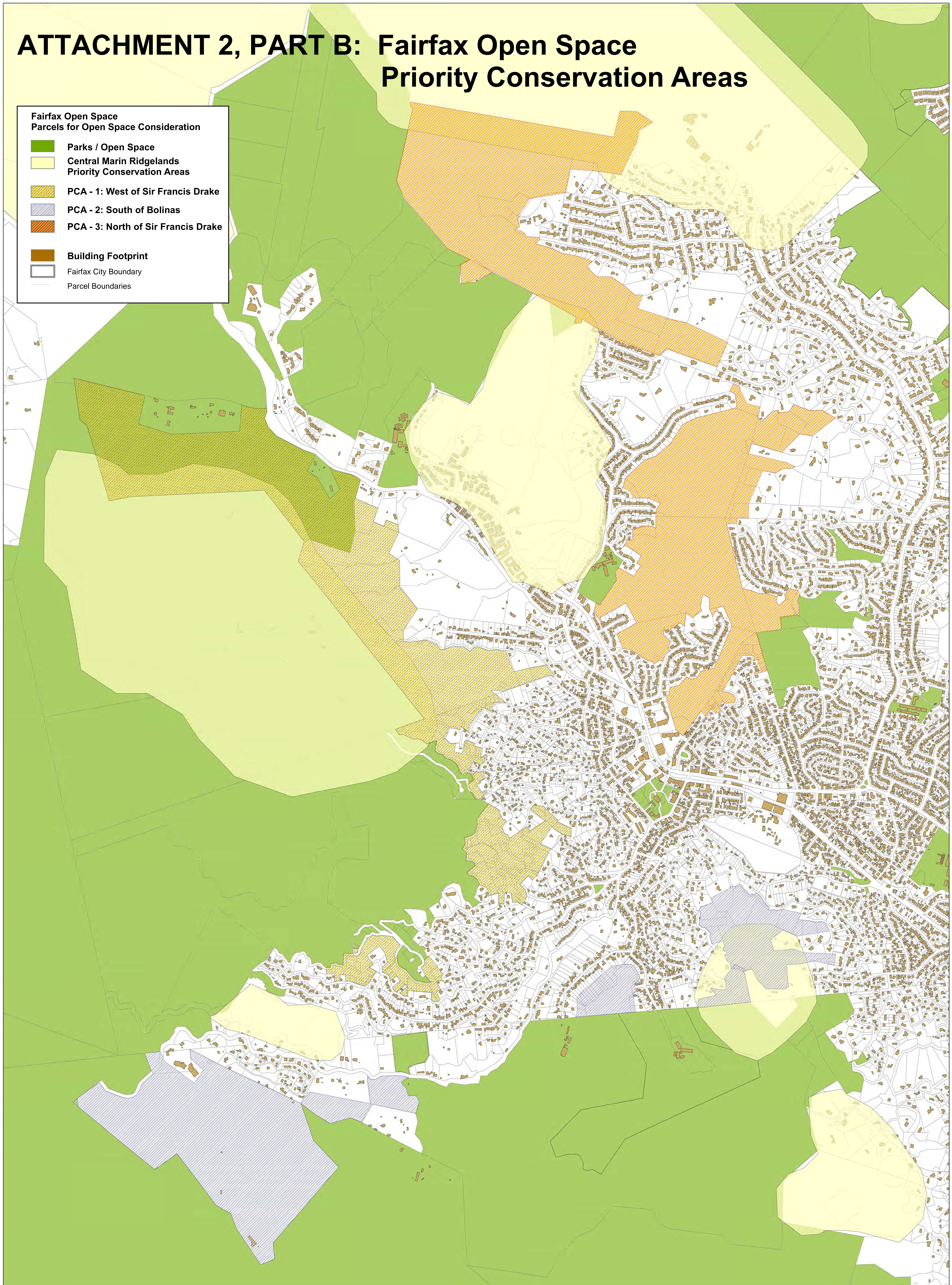
Barbara Coler, Mayor

ATTACHMENT A

# ATTACHMENT 2, PART B: Fairfax Open Space Priority Conservation Areas

**Fairfax Open Space  
Parcels for Open Space Consideration**

-  Parks / Open Space
-  Central Marin Ridgeland  
Priority Conservation Areas
-  PCA - 1: West of Sir Francis Drake
-  PCA - 2: South of Bolinas
-  PCA - 3: North of Sir Francis Drake
-  Building Footprint
-  Fairfax City Boundary
-  Parcel Boundaries



## Why existing PCAs are being amended?

In May 2024, the ABAG Executive Board approved reforms to the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) planning framework which had not been substantially updated since the framework was created in 2007. A two-year PCA Refresh effort culminated in a [Final Report](#) which included reforms that add new structure to the PCAs. The added structure will ensure intentional boundaries for some PCAs that had vague coverage and will require all PCAs to meet new minimum mapping data criteria to ensure a regionally consistent framework backed by data. The goal of these reforms is to ensure a regionally cohesive set of PCA geographies that can be used across a greater array of regional planning and advocacy efforts.

## What is a PCA?

PCAs are defined by two elements: (1) a mapped polygon geography, and (2) a designation as one or more of the five PCA types:

- Natural Lands
- Agricultural & Working Lands
- Urban Greening
- Recreation
- Climate Adaptation

PCAs are nominated by a local government entity; however, in the first round of PCA nominations in 2008, a handful of NGOs nominated PCAs. As part of this amendment process, the local government with land use authority over those areas will be invited to become the lead for those NGO-nominated PCAs and manage any necessary amendments.

## Timeline and Process to amend PCAs.

The amendment process will occur over summer 2024. Jurisdictions can choose to complete the amendments themselves, or request MTC/ABAG staff to take the lead on mapping, providing MTC/ABAG staff with direction for the general approach they'd like to take. Both tracks will include a step for MTC/ABAG staff to verify the amended PCAs meet the eligibility criteria and for local governments to formalize the proposed amendment with the signature of a planning director, parks director, city administrator, or city manager. The ABAG Executive Board will take the final step to designate the package of proposed PCA amendments later this year.

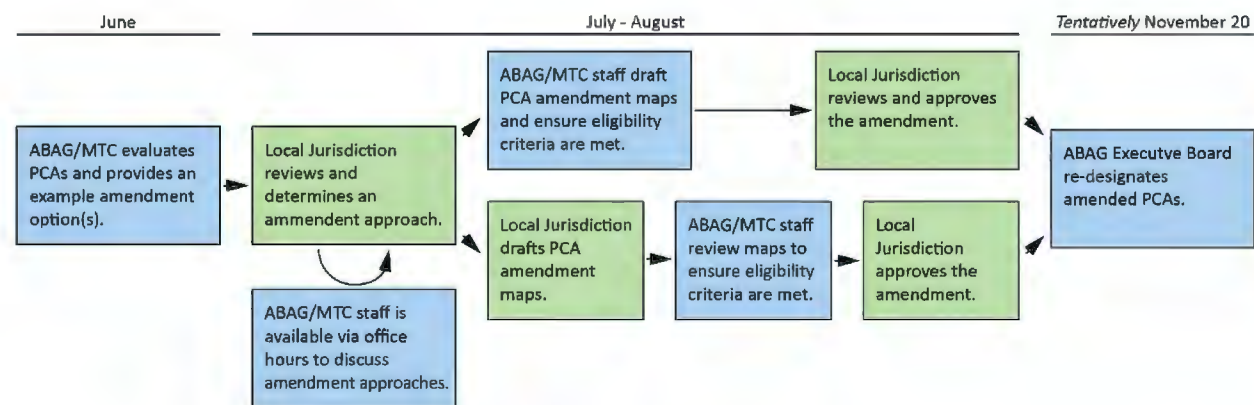


Figure 1: Timeline and Process to Amend Existing PCAs.

Following this phase of work to amend the existing PCAs, ABAG will open a call for new PCA nominations that will be open to all Bay Area jurisdictions.

## Outlining the general approaches to amend PCAs.

Most of the 185 existing PCAs will need to be amended to meet the criteria of the updated framework. Amendments to PCAs will change the drawn extent of a PCA polygon geography and/or alter which PCA types are associated with the PCA. PCAs will be amended using one of the four approaches below:

1. **adjust** the PCA geography area,
2. **reclassify** the PCA types, sometimes removing or swapping PCA types,
3. **split** the PCA into two, or
4. **combination of the above.**

## Evaluating flags for existing PCAs.

To support the amendment process, MTC/ABAG staff have evaluated each PCA across three criteria outlined in the PCA Refresh to inform the amendment needs of each PCA. The three evaluation criteria are described below. The attached spreadsheet outlines which PCAs meet or do not meet each evaluation criteria. When a criteria is not met, MTC/ABAG staff have included additional information.

1. **Intersection with jurisdiction boundaries.** The PCA Refresh defined Natural Land and Working Land PCA types as areas outside city limits or urban growth boundaries and defined Urban Greening as a PCA type specific to areas within city limits or urban growth boundaries. Recreation and Climate Adaptation can span either space. The first evaluation step was to determine if this condition was met for each PCA. For Natural Land and Working Land PCAs, is the geography fully outside urban growth boundaries and/or city limits? For Urban Greening PCAs, is the geography fully inside urban growth boundaries or city limits?
2. **Intersection of PCAs and Eligibility Maps.** In addition to whether a PCA falls inside or outside jurisdiction boundaries, eligibility maps further identify where regional data supports the PCA type designation. To preserve a greater share of existing PCAs, and to enable more flexibility to reflect some datasets have coarse boundaries (in particular urban greening), a 75% threshold was set to meet this requirement. 75% of the PCA must overlap with the eligibility map. An [online mapping viewer](#) includes existing PCA boundaries and eligibility maps.
3. **Intersection between PCAs.** Many PCAs overlap with other PCAs which makes using the geographies challenging for certain analysis, research, and planning. As part of the amendment phase, PCAs with overlapping segments should be adjusted to limit coverage to a single PCA.

In addition to providing an evaluation of each PCA, MTC/ABAG staff have completed a visual scan of the PCA and have drafted an amendment option as a way to meet the new PCA framework criteria. This option is shared as a starting point to consider your amendment approach. Local jurisdictions are responsible for determining the approach they would like to take which may be different than the approach identified in the spreadsheet.

## Office hours with MTC/ABAG staff are available to discuss your questions.

MTC/ABAG staff are available to assist local jurisdictions with amendments over summer 2024. If you have questions about the amendment process you can [email Michael Germeraad](#) or [schedule a 30 minute meeting](#) to discuss your amendment approach.

## Form to document the PCA amendment(s).

The amendment will be formalized using the attached form which will require a director or higher signature from the lead local agency/jurisdiction. Two versions of the form are available, one which can be filled out for a single PCA at a time. The other enables multiple amendments with a single signature.