

Duplicate emails received at Info@BelmontPROSplan.com

Dear Belmont Belmont,

As a local resident, someone who is concerned with wildlife and wilderness protection, and a supporter of In Defense of Animals, I am writing to urge you to prioritize the protection of wildlife and habitat at Waterdog Lake & Open Space in the PROS Master Plan.

Belmont offers many recreational opportunities, but Waterdog is its primary natural open space, and only by prioritizing protection over recreation will we leave future generations of all species the same beautiful and essential wild land we witness today.

While opportunities for outdoor recreation and simply being able to enjoy nature are important, with increasingly little habitat in the Bay Area, this open space is critical for wildlife, and provides an invaluable and much-needed corridor that many species rely on and benefit from.

Protecting spaces like this is also important to residents, who see and respect the value of conserving natural spaces and habitat; Belmont and San Francisco Bay Area residents care about the environment, and they care about protecting wildlife.

If the area is given over further to recreational purposes, it will cease to function as it should. I am also extremely concerned that trails will be further opened here to mountain bikers, who have been damaging trails and running over wild animals.

I sincerely hope you will put conservation first when planning the future of this open space, and prioritize the need to protect it over development.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

| Date Received | Quantity | Commenter Name |
|----------------------|----------|--|
| 11/14/2021 | 1 | Jelica Roland |
| 11/17/2021 | 1 | Dionne Toye |
| November 2021 | 2 | Duplicate Emails Received at Info@BelmontPROSplan.com |

Dear City Council, Parks & Rec Commission, and PROS Committee:

I watched the 11/3/21 meeting on Zoom and wanted to offer some input on Hidden Canyon Park. First, I thought Gates & Associates did a great job in presenting the draft parks improvement element of the PROS plan. I think the Parks staff and Gates have done a fantastic job of doing a needs assessment for our parks and recreational opportunities. The needs assessment shows a very clear need for additional parks in Belmont. Ralston Ranch and Hidden Canyon have been identified as two tremendous opportunities to fill our community's needs - particularly Hidden Canyon which offers the largest opportunity, both in terms of acreage and the proximity to the widest population.

I was unable to make the focus group meeting for Hidden Canyon, but a friend of mine did and I was very disturbed by what he told me. It's my understanding that nearly 100% of the participants were either homeowners from the Hidden Canyon development, or homeowners / political operatives from Belmont Heights such as Pat Cuvielo, Deniz Bolbol, and Kristen Mercer. There was not a single renter or landlord representative from any of the many nearby apartment buildings that house thousands of renters. If you take a look on Zillow, you can see that the Hidden Canyon housing development consists of 31 single family houses, with market values ranging from \$2.2M to \$2.7M. These are among the priciest homes in the city, if not the priciest.

As you know, the guiding principles of the PROS plan include the following points, among others:

- Provide equitable access to resources and activities across the entire city
- Promote inclusion to people of all backgrounds, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic position, or physical/cognitive ability
- Make all users feel welcome and safe
- Adapt to changing conditions and needs

I'm concerned that the first two principles, equitable access and inclusion, are being steamrolled by elite special interests in this process. During the Parks & Rec Commission meeting, David Braunstein (PROS Committee member and former Belmont Mayor / City Councilman of 8+ years) made strong public comment advocating against any improvement in the Hidden Canyon park. He made an analogy that "just because you can build improvements in something like Yellowstone Park, it doesn't mean you should do it." In my opinion this is a false analogy. That analogy would be valid if there was a proposal to build things within the boundaries of the Open Space, but no one is proposing to do that. As you know, Hidden Canyon Park is a parcel of land that is already dedicated to city park use that sits between the Hidden Canyon development and the Waterdog Open Space. In the 1990s, the developer was required to grant that parcel to the city to be used as a park as a condition of the development permit. Specifically, the 1994 City Council resolution approving the Hidden Canyon tract states "... The 5.6 acre park area shall be dedicated to the City of Belmont for the provision of a park" and "The proposed park area will consist of a trail head, drinking fountains, and picnic tables to be developed by the City at a later date, subject to approval by the Parks and Recreation Commission." See <https://ecmx.belmont.gov:81/Image/DownloadPdf/133919>

It seems to me that Mr. Braunstein, as well as the 30 other households in the wealthy Hidden Canyon neighborhood, have a vested interest in keeping that city park lot barren and unappealing. Apparently they feel improvements would increase traffic on "their" street. I put "their" in quotation marks because Carlmont Drive is of course a public street paid for by taxpayer dollars, which everyone has the right to use.

It would be a tremendous shame to see Hidden Canyon Park - the biggest opportunity we have to add desperately needed park infrastructure - lay fallow for the next 20 years, as it has for the past 27 years. In the sale and re-sale contract of every home in the in Hidden Canyon tract, there would have been a disclosure that the 5.6 acre lot at the end of Carlmont Drive was designated to be a city park. Over the past 27 years, it appears a sense of entitlement has developed in that neighborhood that they can keep that land fallow for their benefit, which is to the detriment to the entire city. Of course, as adjoining neighbors to the city park land, they are important stakeholders, and the process needs to consider the impact any development will have on them. However, I feel like in the process thus far, their voices are dominating the discussion to the exclusion of almost everyone else.

Consider this: the undeveloped Hidden Canyon park land is 5.6 acres. That is roughly the same size as Barrett Community center. We have a choice of either providing all 30,000 citizens of our city with 5.6 acres worth of parkland to fill an unmet need for our increasing population, or we can kowtow to interests of 31 of the city's wealthiest households so they can have marginally fewer cars drive down "their" street. I think everyone is in agreement that development of Hidden Canyon Park should be as congruent with the natural setting as possible. It is not an appropriate place for things such as plastic playground equipment or splash pads. (However, a permanent bathroom would be a welcome addition - it would especially be appreciated by seniors and families with small children.) I really liked Commissioner Michaels' idea of a staff outpost with outdoor classroom space. That would provide a great launching point for city staff-guided nature walks, fishing clinics, etc. Something like a scaled-down version of the interpretive center/restroom building at Arastadero Preserve in Palo Alto is something that would fit nicely in the space.

I have a question about the process as it pertains to Hidden Canyon Park. Mr. Braunstein is on the PROS Committee, he lives in the Hidden Canyon tract, and he has now gone on public record vigorously opposing any development of Hidden Canyon Park. (Mr. Braunstein has every right to express opinions at public meetings as a private citizen, and I have no issue with him expressing his opinions at the last Parks & Rec Commission meeting.) However, it seems like a conflict of interest for him to participate on the PROS Committee on items relating to Hidden Canyon Park. During Parks and Recreation Commission meetings, Commissioner Mittelstadt recuses himself when items of Commission business come up on trails adjoining his house. However, as a member of the PROS Committee, don't the same legal or ethical rules require Mr. Braunstein to recuse himself from items of PROS Committee business adjoining his house?

I feel the Hidden Canyon Park issue is just one example of a larger issue with the PROS process that City Council and the Parks & Rec Commission needs to address. We need more balance, more equity, and more inclusion. Of course, every citizen on every side of the issue has the right to speak and be heard. However, the discussion is being dominated by "ghosts of Christmas past" - politicians who have been voted out of office years ago, and would-be politicians who don't have enough support to get into office. At each and every meeting, we are hearing from Deniz Bolbol (losing City Council candidate from 2018 election); Pat Cuvielo (losing City Council candidate from 2020 election), Kristen Mercer (former Planning Commissioner appointed by a prior political regime), and now former mayor/councilman Braunstein. It is a loud, constant drumbeat from the same tiny group of people every time. This is the least diverse demographic group I can possibly think of. They are all white, middle-aged to older retired or semi-retired political operatives who own \$2.2M+ houses adjoining open space. To be clear, I am not saying these people should be marginalized or excluded from the process; I absolutely respect their First Amendment right to speak. However, they do not have the right to dominate every discussion and dictate how our community uses our land. There should be more balance in the process and more input from a broader and more diverse group of community members. More outreach is needed so regular community member voices can get heard over the roar of former/would be politicians.

Finally, I want to make one thing very clear: I am by no means critical of Parks Director Shearer, Gates & Associates, or their respective staff. I think they are all doing a fantastic job with the PROS plan, and the issues with the process are not due to them, but rather the constant barrage from this group of political operatives who are aggressively trying to dominate the agenda. I have a concrete suggestion to bring some balance to this process, at least as it pertains to Hidden Canyon Park. There has already been a Hidden Canyon focus group meeting that was well-attended by the Hidden Canyon homeowners and Belmont Heights political operatives. How about conducting a second Hidden Canyon / Carlmont renter focus group? It will take some outreach to get those folks to the table, but it is well worth the effort. It just seems unfair and inequitable for policy decisions to be made on the basis of input from one tiny special interest group.

Thank you for taking the time to read my lengthy email, and I very much appreciate all the time and effort you are all putting into our PROS Plan process.

Regards,