

**TOWN OF SAN ANSELMO**  
**STAFF REPORT**  
**September 16, 2013**

For the meeting of September 24, 2013

TO: Town Council

FROM: Debra Stutsman, Town Manager

SUBJECT: Red Hill Trail Proposal

**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council considers the request of the Open Space Committee to approve proposal for a Red Hill Trail.

**BACKGROUND**

The Open Space Committee has been looking into the feasibility of building a trail to the top of Red Hill. They feel that the trail would be a unique and attractive asset for the town. Much of the land is already owned by the Town and most of the trail would be on the existing dirt road. The summit, the former site of a water tank, is owned by the Marin Municipal Water District. The best route for the lower part of the trail would be across the land of Sunny Hills, just to the north of the existing roadway. This is because the existing roadway is washed out at this point. The Open Space Committee has learned that MMWD considers their summit property surplus and that Sunny Hills is supportive of the plan. The Open Space Committee members would like to enter discussions with both MMWD and Sunny Hills regarding these parcels. Their proposal for the trail is attached and they will be present at the meeting to make a presentation and answer any questions.

Staff was made aware recently of an opportunity through the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) for trail building. The grant was applied for to cover both the possible Red Hill Trail and the already approved Sunny Hills trail. Preliminary indications are that the grant has been awarded for \$80,000, with a 100% match, half of which can be in in-kind donations, such as labor. Open Space Committee members will be prepared to discuss this as well.

Respectfully submitted,



Debra Stutsman  
Town Manager

Attachments:  
Open Space Proposal  
Map

## Proposal for a Red Hill Trail

### Overview

Red Hill is San Anselmo's most distinctive landmark, looming prominently over the town when approaching from any direction. The view from the 450' summit is breathtaking, with all of the Ross Valley spread below. It offers one of the best views of San Anselmo, with the battlements of the Seminary rising against the slopes of Mount Tamalpais. The horizon is a panorama of scenic ridges, including San Pedro Mountain, Big Rock Ridge, Loma Alta, White's Hill, Pine Mountain, Bald Hill, and Mount Tamalpais. The towers of Oakland and San Francisco gleam in the distance beyond the sparkling Bay. Yet the summit is closer to The Hub than Town Hall is. It would be one of the town's most popular hiking destinations and a real attraction for visitors to downtown — if it weren't so difficult to get to. This proposal is to build a trail to the summit from Red Hill Park, making this beautiful spot again accessible to the public.



### History

Red Hill is a submarine volcano, formed of greenish pillow lava that extruded 150 million years ago onto the floor of a Jurassic ocean (when exposed to the air, the lava weathers to its distinctive rust-red). The prominent and distinctive hill has always been a natural landmark and was one of the property corners for the original Spanish land grants. The zigzag road up the west face was built in 1878 by Chinese laborers hired by Dr. Henry Dubois, founder of Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery. The road, called at the time DuBois' Folly, proved impractical and was never used, though there is a 1916 newspaper story about three men who drove a Model T to the top. In 1967, a heavy rainstorm dislodged a major portion of the steep southern slope, burying a row of apartment buildings. The old roadbed is now overgrown and the lower portion is badly washed out, making any ascent a steep struggle. Dense stands of invasive broom provide shelter for homeless encampments, surrounded by trash. Only the most determined hikers ever get to enjoy the view from the top.



### Ownership

A series of property lines radiate from the summit, forming several pie-slice parcels. The western side including Dubois' road (parcel 006-061-24, 8.2 acres) is owned by the town. The northwestern quarter (parcel 006-061-24, 8.2 acres) is owned by Sunny Hills Services. A narrow sliver to the northeast (177-20-26, 14.5 acres) is outside the town limits and is owned by The Cedars. Just east of the summit, a small 2,048-square-foot parcel (006-122-01), the site of a former water tank, is owned by MMWD. The eastern and southern slopes belong to a series of private landowners and one town parcel but all are too steep to be easily accessible.

### Proposed Route

Since San Anselmo owns Dubois' road, it would be possible to make use of it and build the trail entirely on town-owned land. But the bottom portion of the road behind Safeway has completely slid out, leaving a very steep slope of crumbling loose rock, thickly overgrown with broom. No trace of the road remains in this area. Trail construction would be technically difficult and could raise concerns about safety and stability.

If permission could be obtained from Sunny Hills, however, a trail could start from the Red Hill Park parking lot at the end of Shaw Drive and ascend gradually in a series of wide switchbacks through an open oak-madrone woodland. At approximately 150' elevation, the trail would cross onto town property and strike the old road just above its damaged portion. From that point, the trail would follow the old road at a comfortable 9% slope, requiring little construction. Six traverses across the treeless meadow provide impressive views that only improve as one ascends. Each switchback is in deep woods, offering respite from the sun. At approximately 430' elevation, the road ends at a summit meadow, from which it is an easy stroll to the rocky pinnacle, shaded by immense oaks. This route provides excellent views and variety, a gradual slope, and avoids the portions of the hill subject to landslides. The road is ten to twelve feet wide, so should not provide a safety hazard.

### Construction and permissions

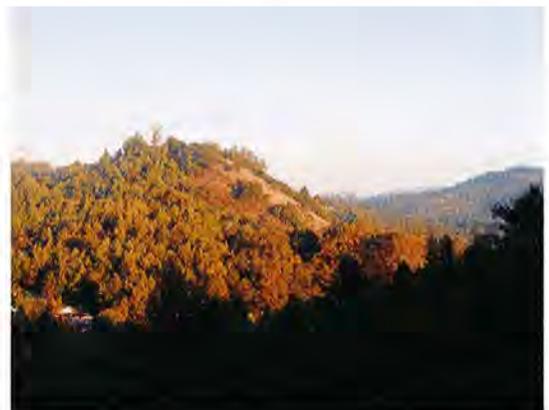
The proposed trail route is about 3,100' long and ascends 350'. More than half the trail is on existing roadbed, requiring only brush removal to be accessible. The Sunny Hills portion would require new trail construction, but for most of its length it could follow existing social and deer trails and should not pose any engineering problems. No bridges will be required. Some railroad ties and rebar for occasional steps and reinforcements should be sufficient, plus water bars to deflect water off the steeper portions. Materials costs should be minimal, and if sufficient volunteer labor can be arranged, the trail could be constructed at very little cost to the town. Construction crews would also haul out trash.

We have contacted Karen Bischoff, Director of Property at Sunny Hills, and Stanley Graham, MMWD's real estate manager, and both were supportive and willing to enter discussions with the Town for trail easements or outright acquisition.

As a possible future extension, if permission could be obtained from one landowner, a trail about 400' long could be constructed from the summit down the east side of the hill to Grove Hill Avenue, connecting the Sequoia Avenue neighborhood to Red Hill Shopping Center and Memorial Park. This trail is not part of the current proposal.

### Summary

This scenic and historic San Anselmo landmark, already owned by the Town and nearly unvisited for over a century, could be again accessible to the public with very little cost to the town. If Sunny Hills donates their parcel, the Town would have a new park of 16.5 acres, adjacent to the existing Red Hill Park, and with off-street parking already available. A large amount of broom and trash would be removed, reducing fire risk and turning an eyesore into an asset. The new park would be maintained by a volunteer committee, similar to Friends of Sorich Park and Friends of Faudé Park. Options for a matching grant from the Transportation Authority of Marin and other sources are being investigated.





### Legend

- Major Road**
  - Highway 101, 580
  - Major Road
- Road**
  - Highway 101, 580
  - Other Highway
  - Local
  - Fire Road
  - Driveway
  - Footpath
  - Railroad
- Address**
- Parcel**
- City Limit Line**
- County Boundary**
- Ocean Bay**
- 2011 USGS Marin 15cm High I**
  - Red Layer\_1
  - Green Layer\_2
  - Blue Layer\_3

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