



Legislation Text

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TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Steven Lederer, Director, Public Works

REPORT BY: Steven Lederer, Director, Public Works

SUBJECT: Discussion and Possible Board Direction Regarding the Disposition of a Section of Old Howell Mountain Road (OHMR)

RECOMMENDATION

Board to receive a presentation, and possibly provide direction on, the disposition of a segment of Old Howell Mountain Road (OHMR) which was closed due to storm damage in 2017 and was further damaged by the January 2023 storms.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Old Howell Mountain Road (OHMR) was closed from a location just north of the St. Helena city limit to its connection with Deer Park Road (the “four corners” intersection) due to damage sustained during the winter storms of 2017. For a variety of reasons, making the repairs to the slide area (at an estimated cost of \$3 million) were not funded by the Board since that time, not the least of which being that further damage from future storms was inevitable. During the storms of 2023, two large additional slides, and dozens of smaller ones, have occurred on the road, raising the anticipated repair bill to something above \$10 million. Staff will provide an update on the Road’s condition, and seeks Board input and direction on future actions.

FISCAL & STRATEGIC PLAN IMPACT

Is there a Fiscal Impact?	Yes
Is it currently budgeted?	No
Where is it budgeted?	This will be determined based on and dependent on the direction provided by the Board.
Is it Mandatory or Discretionary?	Discretionary
Discretionary Justification:	The Board has several options to consider, including a no action alternative.
Is the general fund affected?	No

Future fiscal impact:	This is dependent on future Board direction.
Consequences if not approved:	OHMR will continue in its current condition
County Strategic Plan pillar addressed:	Effective and Open Government

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: Not a project at this time. CEQA will be determined in the future based on any direction provided by the Board.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Old Howell Mountain Road (OHMR) was closed from a location just north of the St. Helena city limit to its connection with Deer Park Road (the “four corners” intersection) due to damage sustained during the winter storms of 2017. A map of the area is attached for Board reference.

For a variety of reasons, repairs to the slide area (at an estimated cost of \$3 million) were not funded by the Board since that time. Some of these reasons include 1) this portion of the roadway does serve any driveways; 2) Use of the road would be very dangerous during a fire; and 3) County staff was concerned that additional slides were likely to occur on the road, thus rendering the investment to fix one large slide as a questionable use of funds.

During the storms of 2023, two large additional slides, and dozens of smaller ones, have occurred on the road, raising the anticipated repair bill to something above \$10 million. Photos of some of the damages are attached. Although two of the recent slides are 2023 storm related, many of the other slides are not, and since the road has been closed it is unlikely that FEMA funds will be forthcoming for any of the repairs.

Staff is looking at several potential options for the Board to consider. There may be others as well.

1. Repair and reopen the road. While just a “back of the envelope” estimate at this time, staff believes costs would exceed \$10 million. For comparison purposes, the normal road repair budget for the entire County is about \$12 million annually.
2. Abandon the Road. The County has a 60 foot wide easement for the length of the road but does not own the underlying land. If the County abandoned the road the land would revert to the private property owners who do own the underlying land.
3. Determine if some other agency (such as Napa County Parks and Open Space District), or non-governmental entity (such as the Land Trust) would be interested in funding, building, and maintaining a bicycle or pedestrian path along the easement. While doing so would still cost a significant amount of money, it would be less than reestablishing the original roadway.

4. Continue the status quo (road closed).

Staff welcomes input from the Board and the Public.