

# Large Fairfax Property Acquired for Open Space

by Ann Thomas

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A 100-acre undeveloped property dubbed by residents the “Crown Jewel of Fairfax” has finally become public open space. The acquisition of the so-called Wall property in late September followed a decade in which development was an ongoing possibility.

The property, which is shaped like a lopsided horseshoe, rises dramatically over northeastern Fairfax, embracing the Marinda Drive/San Gabriel Drive residential neighborhoods. It was designated as open space in the town’s general plan for 20 years but attempts to secure the site for the public were consistently impeded by developers’ efforts.

The Wall purchase caps two dramatic years of open space protection in the upper Ross Valley. This has included three major open space acquisitions: the 60-acre Bald Hill summit in Ross in 2023; the 9.4-acre Upper Hawthorne Canyon parcel, which completed San Anselmo’s Hawthorne Canyon Preserve; and the Wall property, which abuts the San Anselmo Preserve, in late 2024. The latest acquisition, along with the San Anselmo Hawthorne Canyon Open Space Preserve, creates 145 acres of contiguous wild lands.

The name derives from that of long-time owner Dr Alan Wall, a San Francisco heart surgeon who purchased the property in the 1960s. During his tenure the site was re-zoned several times, but all development proposals failed to meet Fairfax planning standards. It was sold in 2013 to a limited liability company owned by a spec builder, under the name of Timberstone LLC, who vigorously pursued development, settling on a proposal for a community named Marinda Heights: up to 10 estate homes with pools and private driveways. All versions of this effort failed to meet the town’s approval for reasons that included zoning inconsistency, maintenance costs, and fire risk. In mid-2023 Timberstone defaulted on a loan and filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Subsequently the property was acquired by a mortgage company and offered for sale.

With acquisition of this long-sought undeveloped property finally within reach, Marin Open Space Trust (MOST) negotiated a purchase of \$2.3 million—less than the appraised value—with a deadline of October 2024 to complete the transaction. Fairfax and the Fairfax Open Space Committee rallied the community and leapt to meet the challenge, joining MOST in a donor campaign. A kick-off dinner and auction at Deer Park Villa in January 2024 raised an initial \$22,000 and MOST soon received

more than \$1 million in pledges from the public to raise funds for purchase and for critical repair and restoration of the hilly canyon property. Other contributors to the acquisition were the Town of Fairfax, the Town of San Anselmo, San Anselmo Open Space Committee, the County of Marin, and the Coastal Conservancy.

Marin County and Fairfax officials agreed that, if the purchase were successful, the property would be owned by Fairfax with the County responsible for maintaining major trails. The property has two major trails that, along with a connection to San Anselmo Hawthorne Canyon Preserve, encircle the property. There is also a connection at the north edge of the property with the Wilder Road Trail Easement maintained by Marin County Parks (MCP). This easement connects the Wall property to Loma Alta Open Space at the north end of our watershed.



*In a view from Loma Alta the grassy ridge of the Wall property is seen in the center. Photo by Charles Kennard*

Under their agreement with Fairfax, MCP will provide routine trail maintenance on the main trails, install signage provided by Fairfax, and service two dog waste stations. Maintenance includes repairing road/trail erosion, removing vegetation that can impede access, but does not include decommissioning of existing unauthorized, trails. MCP does not have a planning or enforcement role. The Town of Fairfax will establish user guidelines and provide any needed interventions to regulate the use of the property.

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