



Forrest Richardson to develop renovation plan for Pajaro Valley

New turf, naturalisation and drainage work is expected to cut water use by more than 40 per cent



The existing seventh hole at the California club



By Richard Humphreys | 07 November 2023

Pajaro Valley Golf Club near Watsonville, California, has appointed Forrest Richardson to develop a golf course renovation plan.

The course first opened as Watsonville Country Club in 1926 with a nine-hole design and was later expanded to 18 holes. Peter Hay, Pebble Beach’s long-standing professional, provided design and guidance to the group of locals who founded the course with the desire for it to be a public layout for the residents of Pajaro Valley.

“Pajaro is the last remaining untouched classic era course in the Monterey region,” said Richardson. “It struck me during my first visit that very little had been done to the course since the second nine was added more than 70 years ago.”

Pajaro Valley currently plays as a par 72 of just over 6,400 yards, and Richardson’s plans will see the total length increasing to 6,700 yards, while becoming a par 71.

Richardson aims to preserve many of the holes that are laid out across the Pajaro Valley. The long par-four seventeenth will become a risk-reward par five playing along the same corridor to the existing green site. “Our new seventeenth had to be preserved,” he said. “It simply lays out as one of the best holes you could ever hope for – beautiful terrain and an amazing green site with views in all directions once the golfer reaches the green perched at the end of the ridge.”

Water use is expected to be cut by more than 40 per cent, with new drought-tolerant turf, more naturalised areas and the return of natural drainage areas throughout the course.

Development group Parks Legacy Project has managed the course since 2020 and acquired it in 2023. Director of design and entitlements Mark Swartz has worked with Richardson on several golf course projects since the 1990s. The group is masterplanning a project to integrate existing residential zoning approvals along with a small portion of the site that is planned for a new campground with cabins and RV sites.

“The Pajaro project embodies everything we do best,” said Swartz. “We are working with an iconic community asset to bring it back to life, balancing new uses while keeping our eye on preservation of the site’s most important open space — the 18-hole course.”

Local architectural firm Studio Schicketanz and California-based architects Tucker Stadler will work with the project team on site planning, including the overnight cabin and RV area, a community market and an area for a new residential neighbourhood. The project covers 200 acres including a new ‘Resource Conservation’ area. There will also be a new clubhouse, designed by architects Swaback Partners.

“It’s an honour to work with such a great setting, not to mention a team that is so enthusiastic about doing the right thing in terms of preservation and habitat,” said Richardson. “It’s been a great experience to be involved from the very start, and to help set the vision that will return the property to its ‘point of pride’ status that was first set in motion by Peter Hay nearly 100 years ago. We can imagine the excitement back then, and there is no shortage of excitement today as we get ready for the transformation to begin.”

Parks Legacy Project anticipates formal permit requests to be applied for in early 2024. Both Monterey County and California’s Coastal Commission have been involved in preliminary meetings to help guide the plans.

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