

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: COMMUNITY SERVICES AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENTS

DATE: FEBRUARY 23, 2016

SUBJECT: PARKS, TRAILS, NATURAL OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION
MASTER PLAN

RECOMMENDATION

No action to be taken.

BACKGROUND

The City of Palo Alto has 37 parks and open space preserves covering approximately 4,165 acres of land, which includes Foothills Park, Pearson Arastradero Preserve, and the Baylands Nature Preserve. A Capital Improvement Project for a Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Recreation Master Plan (Master Plan) was adopted by Council for the 2013 fiscal year. The purpose of this project is to provide the necessary analysis and review of Palo Alto's parks and recreation system for the preparation of a Master Plan. The Master Plan will provide the City with clear guidance regarding future renovations and capital improvement projects aimed at meeting current and future demands on the city's recreational, programming, environmental, and maintenance needs, establishing a prioritized schedule and budget of future park renovations, facility improvements and expansion of recreational programs.

The Master Plan process consists of three phases: Phase 1) Analysis and community input; Phase 2) Recommendations and prioritization; and Phase 3) Master Plan drafting and adoption. The planning process is currently focused on the second phase of the Master Plan developing and prioritizing recommendations for the overall parks and recreation system as well as drafting revised and new policies that will support the Master Plan recommendations.

DISCUSSION

As the development of the master plan has progressed a structure for how the draft master plan will be organized has been established. The structure and how these segments of the master plan link together are as follows:

- Principles
- Goals (Revised Areas of Focus)
- Policies
- Project and Program Recommendations

Draft Goals

The analysis and community input phase resulted in the compilation of 12 areas of focus that identify the key components guiding policy, project, and program recommendations. With feedback from the Commission and staff, the 12 areas of focus were consolidated into five goals. One additional goal, “Manage Palo Alto’s land and services effectively, efficiently, and sustainably” was added to represent the standards by which existing and future parks, recreation, and open space systems would be operated. The proposed draft goals are presented as Attachment A.

Draft Policies

Proposed revised and new draft policies are being presented to the commission for feedback and input (Attachment B). The policies coincide with the formulation of the master plan goals and are intended to support the goals. This list represents policies developed from community input, park and program analysis, staff input and commission feedback throughout the planning process. The draft policies will work to support the master plan goals as well as other city plans such as the comprehensive plan, public art master plan and urban forest master plan. The policies will also provide direction for future renovations and enhancements of the parks, recreation and open space system.

The commission is requested to review and discuss the proposed draft goals and policies and provide further input to assist with their development.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Draft Overarching Goals
- B. Draft Policies

NEXT STEPS

A City Council Study Session tentatively scheduled in April 2016 will review the master planning process activities completed to date and obtain feedback on the evaluation and prioritization process

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proposed CIP recommendations are consistent with Policy C-26 of the Community Services element of the Comprehensive Plan that encourages maintaining park facilities as safe and healthy community assets; and Policy C-22 that encourages new community facilities to have flexible functions to ensure adaptability to the changing needs of the community.

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ATTACHMENT 'A'

DRAFT OVERARCHING GOALS

Overview

This document presents six goals. Goals 1-5 encompass the 12 Areas of Focus as presented in the Community Prioritization Challenge. Goal 6 encompasses management of the system, capturing the System Management category from the Project and Program Ideas list. The goals build on the efforts of the PRC Ad Hoc Committee. For each goal, the areas of focus addressed are listed.

- 1. Provide high-quality facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive, and distributed equitably across Palo Alto.***
 - Distributing park and recreation activities and experiences across the city
 - Improving the accessibility of the full range of park and recreation opportunities
 - Exploring new types of programs, classes, events and activities for all ages and abilities
- 2. Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of uses of the existing system of parks, recreation, and open space facilities and services.***
 - Improving and enhancing community center and recreation spaces across the community
 - Enhancing capacity and quality of sports fields
 - Increasing the variety of things to in existing parks
- 3. Create environments that encourage active and passive activities to support health, wellness and social connections.***
 - Increasing health and wellness opportunities in parks and programs
 - Enhancing comfort and making parks more welcoming
- 4. Integrate nature, natural systems and ecological principles throughout Palo Alto.***
 - Integrating nature into Palo Alto parks
- 5. Develop innovative programs, services and strategies for expanding the system***
 - Offering more of the existing programs, classes, events
 - Expanding the system
- 6. Manage Palo Alto's land and services effectively, efficiently and sustainably.***



ATTACHMENT 'B'

DRAFT POLICIES

Overview

The project team has also been working on developing policies that will give overarching direction to City staff and the PRC, and will also provide a foundation for the projects and programs that will be included in the Master Plan. A cross-departmental work session was convened on January 25, 2016 to review and provide feedback on the draft policies.

This document provides each of the six goals, accompanied by the relevant areas of focus and policies. The goals are numbered 1 through 6. Under each goal, the policies are numbered for reference (1.A, 1.B, 1.C, etc).

The definition of a policy is a course or principle of action that provides clear guidance regarding recreation program provision, park maintenance and operations or future renovations and capital improvement needs for parks, trails, open space and recreation facilities.

Goal 1: Provide high-quality facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Palo Alto.

Areas of Focus

- Distributing park and recreation activities and experiences across the city
- Improving the accessibility of the full range of park and recreation opportunities
- Exploring new types of programs, classes, events and activities for all ages and abilities

Policies

- 1.A Emphasize equity and affordability in the provision of programs and services and the facilitation of partnerships, to create recreation opportunities that:
 - Advance skills, build community and improve the quality of life among participants, especially Palo Alto youth; and
 - Are available at a wide range of facilities, at an increased number of locations and distributed evenly throughout the city.
- 1.B Retain the standard of five acres of park land per 1,000 residents for developed parks and follow best practices for measuring service levels. This standard does not include developed or undeveloped open spaces.

- 1.C Evaluate park service areas to maintain accessibility by applying a walkshed methodology that evaluates how people travel to parks and recreation facilities on the street and trail system.
- 1.D Adopt the following service areas as the desired maximum distance between residents' homes and the nearest park or recreation facility, in order of priority:
 - o Public park or preserve: ½-mile, ¼-mile preferred;
 - o Play experiences: ¼-mile;
 - o Picnic shelter, picnic area or amphitheater: ½-mile;
 - o Community garden: one mile; and
 - o Dog park: one mile.
- 1.E Adopt the wayfinding signage used at Rinconada Park as the standard for Palo Alto parks and provide standardized directory signs for all large parks, preserves and athletic field complexes.
- 1.F Apply universal design principles as the preferred guidance for design solutions in parks, striving to exceed Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.
- 1.G Continue to apply the Field and Tennis Court Brokering and Use Policy as well as the Gymnasium Use Policy (as well as any subsequent updates) to guide the allocation of these recreation facilities with a preference for youth and Palo Alto residents.
- 1.H Encourage walking and biking as the preferred method of getting to and from parks, supporting implementation of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan.
- 1.I Incorporate cultural diversity in projects and programs to encourage citizen participation.
- 1.J Create and promote opportunities for youth and adults to participate in parks, recreation, open space events, projects and programs through volunteerism.
- 1.K Affirm the Child's Right to Play adopted by the International Play Association alongside the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of the Child in a play policy recognizing:
 - o Play is a part of education;
 - o Play is an essential part of family and community life;
 - o Children need opportunities to play at leisure; and
 - o The needs of the child must have priority in the planning of human settlements.
- 1.L Explore and support the City's potential designation as an AARP Age-Friendly Community.

Goal 2: Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of uses of the existing system of parks, recreation and open space facilities and services.

Areas of Focus

- Improving and enhancing community center and recreation spaces across the community
- Enhancing capacity and quality of sports fields
- Increasing the variety of things to do in existing parks
- Improving spaces and increased options for off-leash dogs

Policies

- 2.A Sustain the community’s investment in recreation facilities by completing all “Catch Up” projects identified in the Infrastructure Blue Ribbon Committee recommendations and continuing to budget adequate funding for “Keep Up” projects.
- 2.B Strive to provide the following features in every public park, appropriately scaled for the size and intended character of each site:
- Provide restrooms except where alternatives (adjacent businesses or public facilities) exist or site is under 1 acre in size;
 - Provide a looped walking path or hiking trail within the site or around its perimeter;
 - Provide an open lawn area suited for flexible play and uses; and
 - Provide an active recreation facility (e.g., bocce, pickleball, basketball, tennis, skate park, athletic field, climbing wall).
- 2.C Design and maintain high quality turf fields with adequate time for resting to support maximum use in parks by multiple organized sports and casual users with areas large enough for practice or play. Invest in tournament-quality high-wear sports field turf (see Natural vs. Synthetic Turf Analysis) at designated sports fields used full time for sports where lighting is possible. Policy Direction Needed: Should the policy be written to encourage more synthetic turf, to retain existing synthetic turf and replace it, to exclude synthetic turf, or to consider it on a case-by-case basis?
- 2.D Policy Direction Needed: Should the Master Plan retain existing policy (requiring dogs to be on-leash) and strongly push for building more off-leash areas OR should it change the policy to allow dogs off-leash during specified hours in some parks. In either case, the policy should continue to exclude off-leash dogs from open space preserves.

Goal 3: Create environments that encourage active and passive activities to support health, wellness and social connections.

Areas of Focus

- Enhancing comfort and making parks more welcoming
- Increasing health and wellness opportunities in parks and programs

Policies

- 3.A With the community implement the City’s Healthy City Healthy Community resolution
- 3.B Incorporate artistic expression into park design and recreation programming (consistent with the Art Master Plan).
- 3.C Require that proposed privately owned public spaces that are provided in lieu of park fees meet Palo Alto design guidelines and standards for publicly owned parks, including Master Plan policies 1.C, 1.D and 2.B and are designed to support self-directed exercise and fitness.

Goal 4: Integrate nature, natural systems and ecological principles throughout Palo Alto.

Areas of Focus

- Integrating nature into Palo Alto parks

Policies

- 4.A Incorporate nature into recreation programs to connect youth and adults to the outdoors and introduce outdoor skills.
- 4.B Connect natural areas, open spaces and contiguous vegetated areas in parks and on public land as wildlife, bird, pollinator and habitat corridors by planting with species that support pollinators or provide habitat values.
- 4.C Reduce the urban heat island effect in Palo Alto by using asphalt and concrete only where necessary, using pervious surfaces where feasible and expanding tree canopy in parks in accordance with the Urban Forestry Master Plan.
- 4.D Explore options to expand access to Foothill Park for non-residents.
- 4.E Update the City's ecosystem management and planning to account for the ongoing hotter and drier climate by applying ambient rainwater standards (currently used in open spaces) to urban parks.

Goal 5: Develop innovative programs, services and strategies for expanding the system.

Areas of Focus

- Expanding the system
- Offering more of the existing programs, classes, events

Policies

- 5.A Refine Special Event programming within Community Services to activate parks on a more regular basis. This includes developing a series of smaller scale events held at more locations, more frequently.
- 5.B Support innovation in recreation programming by:
 - Creating an exception to cost recovery and performance requirements for the first full year of a new program;
 - Reviewing program data based on clearly communicated objectives for reach, impact, attendance and financial performance;
 - Retiring, ending or refreshing programs that require staff, facility and financial resources but do not achieve program objectives, thereby freeing up resources for new programs; and
 - Actively developing a small number of pilot programs each year to test new ideas, locations and target audiences.
- 5.C Designate park-like spaces at public facilities (such as the King Plaza at City Hall, the Secret Garden at the Children's Theatre, outdoor spaces at the Art Center and libraries) as Public Spaces to recognize their role in providing space for recreation programming, informal park activities and enhancements to public health.

- 5.D Expand the overall parks system through repurposing public land, incorporating public park spaces on parking decks and rooftops and other creative means to help address shortages of available land.
- 5.E Allow and encourage parklets and other temporary park spaces for both long and short-term uses.
- 5.F Encourage new parks and identified neighborhood needs as part of the Development Agreement process.
- 5.G Explore options to expand access to Foothill Park for non-residents.
- 5.H Continue partnerships and collaborations with Palo Alto Unified School District and Stanford University to support access and joint use of facilities where appropriate for effective delivery of services and programs.

Goal 6: Manage Palo Alto's land and services effectively, efficiently and sustainably.

Policies

- 6.A Continue to implement the Cost Recovery Policy for recreation programs, refining the cost figures and expectations using the most current information available.
- 6.B Limit the exclusive use of Palo Alto parks (booking an entire park site) for events by outside organizations that are closed to the general public.
- 6.C Facilitate partnerships and sponsorships with corporate entities for funding and to support recreation programming and capital projects.
- 6.D Expand the memorial program to include additional options for donations to support low-maintenance park features in memory of a person or event. All memorial fees should include a fully loaded endowment and clear expectations for maintenance following the model of the memorial bench program.
- 6.E Update existing guidance for development, operations, and maintenance of Palo Alto's PTNOSR system based on the best practices in the industry and this Master Plan, including:
 - o Park Rules and Regulations;
 - o Open Space Policy & Procedure Handbook;
 - o City of Palo Alto Landscape Standards; and
 - o Tree Technical Manual.
- 6.F Increase energy efficiency in Palo Alto parks, including allocating funding to retrofit facilities for energy efficiency with increased insulation, green or reflective roofs and low-emissive window glass where applicable and sustainable.
- 6.G Continue with the Integrated Pest Management ("IPM") policy as written. While some parks may be managed as "pesticide free" on a demonstration basis, IPM should continue to be Palo Alto's approach, grounded in the Best Available Science on pest prevention and management.
- 6.H Reduce the amount of waste produced at park facilities and by park operations.
- 6.I Reduce GHG emissions produced by Department equipment and fleet.
- 6.J Strategically reduce maintenance requirements at parks, open spaces, natural preserves and community centers while maintaining Palo Alto's high quality standards.
- 6.K Provide leadership in water conservation.

- 6.L Continue to coordinate with and/or use other relevant City plans, including:
 - Urban Forest Master Plan;
 - Urban Water Master Plan;
 - Long-term electric acquisition plan (LEAP);
 - Water Reclamation Master Plan;
 - Recycled Water Project;
 - Comprehensive Plan; and
 - Others adopted in the future.
- 6.M Continue to involve other relevant City departments and divisions in planning, design and programming, drawing on the unique and specialized skills and perspectives of:
 - The Palo Alto Art Center;
 - Library, including Children’s Library;
 - Junior Museum and Zoo;
 - Children’s Theatre;
 - Public Art;
 - Transportation;
 - Urban Forestry; and
 - Planning.
- 6.N Participate in and support implementation of regional plans related to parks, recreation, natural open space and trails, such as:
 - 2014 Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Vision;
 - Clean Bay Pollution Prevention Plan; and
 - Land Use Near Streams in Santa Clara County.