

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: COMMUNITY SERVICES AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENTS

DATE: APRIL 26, 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 recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Staff will present the updated goals and policies discussed at the March 2016 Commission meeting. Staff will also provide the results of the online community challenge for review.

Per community and commission feedback from last month's discussion concerning the goals and policies development, an updated draft has been included. Key revisions to the goals and policies include the suggested additions by the Audubon Society and Sierra Club, as well as updates to policies discussed in detail with the Commission and Ad Hoc Committees, specifically dog parks, turf fields, and restrooms. For a review of the revised draft goals and policy document refer to Attachment A.

At the December 2015 Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meeting staff shared the initial draft list of projects and programs. Compiled by the consultants and reviewed by staff and the Commission, the draft list of potential projects and program ideas represents all the potential enhancements and expansion recommendations for the parks and recreation system. This draft list was created from the information gathered in the analysis phase of the project including physical inventory and community feedback, and utilizes the Areas of Focus that were developed as part of the community on line survey challenge as an overall structure. The draft list included a total of 143 potential new project and programs as well as policies and best practices. The policies and best practices have been incorporated into the goals and polices document (Attachment A), and staff are continuing to refine the list of projects and program recommendations.

Community Challenge Results

The City of Palo Alto has been actively working on the Parks, Trails, Natural Open Space and Recreation Master Plan (Parks Master Plan) for over a year, developing a strong understanding of the desires of the community, the strengths of the system and opportunities to improve on the already highly valued park system. Over the course of the project, the planning team has collected and analyzed a large volume of data and public input about Palo Alto's parks, trails, natural open space and recreation system. The project team and the PRC worked together to filter down the ideas and possibilities identified for the entire system into a set of “areas of focus” for enhancement. Each of these “areas of focus” captures a theme from the public input and system analysis, representing a direction for the ultimate plan.

To obtain community input on how to prioritize the enhancements, the project team implemented an online interactive exercise called the “Community Prioritization Challenge” from August 28, 2015 to February 15, 2016. This online exercise was supplemented by an in-person workshop held on February 11, 2016. The objective of the prioritization challenge was to elicit community input on how much emphasis to put on each of the areas in relation to one another, which sets the relative priority of the projects and programs included in the Parks Master Plan. The following summary provides results of the workshop and online exercise.

Summary Points of Overall Survey Findings included:

- Overall, each “area of focus” received some investment from respondents. This indicates that participants overall felt all of these areas of focus are relevant directions for the final plan.
- “Improving and enhancing community center and recreation spaces across the community” was allocated a high average amount to improving and enhancing community center and recreation spaces across Palo Alto (nearly 3 to 3.5 times higher than the lowest ranked area of focus in that particular element). In addition to the high level of support, this could also reflect a recognition by respondents of the

high costs involved in community center improvements, relative to other potential “areas of focus.”

- “Exploring new programs, classes and events” was allocated more resources than “expanding existing recreation programming”, indicating a preference for new recreation options.
- In general, the top areas of focus (ranked according to average \$ allocated) under each element usually received a higher percentage of respondents choosing to invest more than \$2. Likewise, a higher percentage of respondents chose not to invest any funding in the lowest ranked areas of focus in each element.
- The exception to this pattern is “improving spaces and increased options for off-leash dogs”, which had a relatively smaller number of respondents allocating a larger amount of funding.
- “Improving the accessibility of the full range of park and recreation opportunities” received the lowest average allocation of funding in all three elements. The definition of accessibility here includes both accesses across the community and removing barriers to access for people with different abilities. This lower investment could reflect some satisfaction with the distribution or availability of parks and facilities across the community. In general, the top responses in the full ranked list matched the top responses by element.
- “Integrating nature into Palo Alto parks” received the highest level of funding in the overall ranking, compared to ranking second when respondents prioritized “areas of focus” within the parks, natural open space and trails element.
- A relatively smaller percentage of respondents chose to invest heavily (14% invested more than \$2 out of their \$10 budget) to in “improving spaces and increase options for off-leash dogs.”
- “Enhancing the quality and capacity of sport fields” ranked number 7 overall and also received relatively large investments from a smaller group of respondents.
- 50% or more of respondents allocated at least some funding to “integrating nature into Palo Alto parks”, “improving and enhancing community center and recreation spaces across the community” and “enhancing comfort and making spaces more inviting”.
- “Improving the accessibility of the full range of park and recreation opportunities” and “increasing health and wellness opportunities in parks and programs” ranked the lowest in overall budget allocated by respondents.

Refer to Attachment B for the full survey results and findings.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Revised Draft Policies (Clean & Red line version)
- B. Community Challenge Survey Results

NEXT STEPS

A City Council Study Session scheduled for May 16, 2016 will review the master planning process activities completed to date and obtain feedback on the goals and policies. Specific focus will be placed on the policies that address dog parks and restrooms.

Staff will continue to evaluate the list of projects and programs that was compiled during the community engagement process and align those projects and programs with the goals and policies.

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.

PREPARED BY

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