

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: DAREN ANDERSON

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE: JANUARY 23, 2018

SUBJECT: ALLOWING PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE 7.7 ACRES OF PARK LAND AT
FOOTHILLS PARK

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) recommend that Council direct staff to:

1. Open the 7.7 acres parcel of Foothills Park to public access as soon as the necessary security fencing for the plant nursery and 7' culvert is in place.
2. Direct staff to engage the community and the Commission to finalize a recommendation for Council on how to use the 7.7 acre parcel.

BACKGROUND

The 7.7 acre parcel was a gift to the City of Palo Alto in 1981 by the Lee family. The Lee family retained an estate on the property until 1996 when it reverted to the City. From 1996 to 2005 the City leased the land to a private resident who owns the land adjacent to the 7.7 acre parcel.

On August 18, 2014, Council passed an ordinance dedicating the 7.7 acre parcel as park land. Council directed the Commission to facilitate the development of ideas for specific land use options of the newly dedicated 7.7 acres in Foothills Park. A Commission Ad Hoc committee was formed to help direct the process of collecting public input on the issue.

In October 2014, four Ranger-led tours of the 7.7 acres were made available to the public. A total of 9 members of the public attended those tours. On October 18, 2014, a public meeting was held at Foothills Park to collect suggestions and comments from the public on ideas for how to best use the newly acquired park land. There was another Ranger-led tour occurring prior to the meeting. Approximately 10 people attended this tour and 27 people attended the meeting.

On February 24, 2015, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that Council direct staff to conduct a hydrology study of Buckeye Creek and to keep the 7.7 acre parcel closed until after the hydrology study is completed. The Commission commented that the hydrology study should be completed before making any recommendations on how to use the land, because the recommendations on how to best address the hydrology issues may alter the City's decision on how best to use the land.

On August 31, 2015, Council approved the Commission and staff recommendation to:

1. Complete the Buckeye Creek hydrology study before making any specific recommendations for possible future use of the newly dedicated park land.

2. Direct staff to return to the Parks and Recreation Commission to finalize a recommendation for Council on how to use the 7.7 acre parcel after the hydrology study is complete.
3. Direct staff to evaluate the impacts of the recommendation to Council on the Acterra Nursery lease, which includes a provision allowing for termination of the lease with a 90-day notification.

When Council dedicated the 7.7 acre parcel as park land, several council members expressed an interest in opening it to the public as soon as possible. Council also expressed the value of having the parcel open to the public so that the public could spend time in the area and be able to provide meaningful input on how the land should be used.

The Buckeye Creek Hydrology Study (Study) is now complete, and will be brought to Council in spring 2018. Opening the 7.7 acre parcel to public access upon completion of the Study is consistent with the Council's direction to staff in August 2015.

While the Study includes an option for creek improvements on a 1.2 acre section of the 7.7 acre parcel, the staff recommendation for resolving the Buckeye Creek's issues does not include implementing the creek improvements in the 7.7 acre parcel. For more information regarding this recommendation please refer to the January 23, 2018 Commission staff report regarding the Study.

DISCUSSION

Staff and the Ad Hoc Committee recommend opening the 7.7 acres parcel to public access, and reaching out to the community to assess potential additional dedicated uses and amenities for that area. Any further development of the 7.7 acres is expected to require funding that is not presently available, but Parks staff and the Ad Hoc Committee will continue to collect feedback and work with the community to develop plans for best uses of the space.

While there aren't any park amenities on the 7.7 acre parcel, the Oak Grove Picnic Area is a short walk away from the 7.7 acre parcel, and has parking, seating, a drinking fountain, and a park restroom. Prior to opening the 7.7 acre parcel to public access, the appropriate fencing will be added to secure the native plant nursery, and culvert. The neighboring private property owner has installed fencing to secure their property line.

RESOURCE IMPACT

The cost for the fencing for securing the native plant nursery and the 7' diameter culvert is approximately \$25,000, which will be funded from existing budget.

NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE

Staff and the Commission's recommendation regarding opening the 7.7 acres parcel to public access will be discussed with Council at the same time that Council reviews the Buckeye Creek Hydrology Study in spring 2018.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: [August 31, 2015, City Council Staff Report Possible Uses for the 7.7 Acre Area at Foothills Park \(ID # 5911\)](#)

PREPARED BY: _____

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Services Department