

**TO:           PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION**

**FROM:       DAREN ANDERSON     DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**DATE:        AUGUST 27, 2019**

**SUBJECT:    DRAFT PLAN FOR THE 7.7-ACRE AREA OF FOOTHILLS PARK**

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) discuss the draft plan for the 7.7-acre area of Foothills Park (Attachment A).

**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 Parks and Recreation 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, there were several Ranger-led tours of the 7.7 acres, and 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. Some participants suggested building a campground, picnic area, and dog park. However, the majority of participants recommended that the site be restored to improve the habitat.

On January 27, 2015, the Parks and Recreation Commission discussed the possible uses for the 7.7 acres at Foothills Park. The Commission recommended that staff complete the Buckeye Creek Hydrology Study (Study) prior to developing plans for the use of the 7.7-acre area. The Commission reviewed the Study on January 23, 2018. While the Study includes an option for creek improvements on the 7.7-acre parcel, the Commission recommendation for resolving Buckeye Creek’s erosion and sedimentation issues does not include implementing the creek improvements in the 7.7-acre parcel. For more information on the study please refer to the May 29, 2018 Council staff report on the Buckeye Creek Hydrology Study <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/65118>.

The 7.7-acre area was opened to the public on November 10, 2018. Park Rangers have observed that the area averages approximately 10 park visitors per day. The Rangers noted that the visitors typically enjoy a brief walk through the property, and often express interest in the native plant nursery.

**DISCUSSION**

The Commission Ad Hoc Committee on Foothills Park, Grassroots Ecology (the City's restoration stewardship partner), and staff worked together to create a draft plan for the 7.7-acre area (Attachment A). The draft plan focuses on restoration, but also includes a simple loop trail and some basic park amenities (park benches, drinking fountain, and interpretive signage) that are in-keeping with other areas of Foothills Park. The draft plan allows for the improvement and preservation of habitat, as well as the enjoyment and education of park visitors. The draft plan is not in conflict with potential creek improvement flood plain area listed as an option in the Buckeye Creek Hydrology Study.

The proposed restoration activities would be accomplished in coordination with Grassroots Ecology (GRE). GRE maintains a native plant nursery on the 7.7-acre parcel and has been conducting restoration in Foothills Park since 2013. They have engaged thousands of volunteers to remove invasive species, plant locally native species, and provide hands-on education for community members of all ages. GRE staff and volunteers have worked in the 7.7-acre area on controlling invasive species and installing willow stakes in Buckeye Creek to help with erosion control along the banks and create valuable habitat for insects and birds. GRE staff have also experimented with test plots to determine which soil amendments and plants can be successful in the compacted soils in the 7.7-acre area. The lessons learned from these experiments have been incorporated into the draft plan.

#### Next Steps

Staff will conduct community outreach to collect feedback on the draft plan, as well as other ideas the community may have for the use of the 7.7-acre area.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Draft Plan for the 7.7-acre area of Foothills Park