

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Planning and Development Services Department

DATE: January 28, 2020

SUBJECT: North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan, and Matadero Creek Study Update

RECOMMENDATION

This report provides the Parks and Recreation Commission an update on the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP) and the Matadero Creek Improvement Study. The staff report includes (1) high level plans for open space throughout the NVCAP project area and (2) draft proposals to naturalize the Matadero Creek. Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) review the staff report and provide input to the Matadero Creek Study and the draft planning alternatives. No action will be taken.

BACKGROUND

The City Council initiated the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP) process on November 6, 2017. The NVCAP was a direct outcome of the Comprehensive Plan Update Program L4.10.1. The purpose of the NVCAP is to capture the City's vision for this neighborhood into a regulatory document that will guide future development and will include land use policies, development standards, and design guidelines. The NVCAP is intended to strengthen the neighborhood fabric and consider infrastructure needs, providing for a mix of land uses that take advantage of the proximity of the Caltrain station, the California Avenue area, and El Camino Real.

The NVCAP project area is approximately 60-acre site roughly bounded by Page Mill Road, El Camino Real, Lambert Avenue, and the Caltrain tracks. The existing plan area has a mix of small and large businesses and single family residences. The site represents a rare opportunity within the city to plan proactively for a transit-oriented, mixed-use neighborhood. The project area includes one of the largest housing opportunity sites in Palo Alto, at 340 Portage Avenue (previously occupied by Fry's Electronics).

The City was awarded a \$638,000 federal Priority Development Area grant for the preparation of the plan in September 2018 by the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, the Association of Bay Area Governments, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

Following the initial Council direction, a Working Group of 14 members was appointed and a planning consultant, Perkins+Will, was selected by the City Council to work with staff on the development of the draft plan. Eleven Working Group meetings have been held since project initiation on November 6, 2017. A community workshop was held on February 5, 2019 at the Mitchell Park Community Center. Several stakeholder meetings and public hearings took place throughout 2019, including a joint City Council and Working Group Town Hall meeting in March 2019.

Public outreach is an important component of the NVCAP project. Staff has worked with the Working Group, the Ventura Neighborhood Association, and other groups to publicize meetings and solicit input. A project website has been established <https://www.paloaltonvcap.org/>, which is serving as one of the primary outreach tools. The website provides background information, meeting materials and all other related resources.

DISCUSSION

Matadero Creek

In the March 11, 2019, at a joint Town Hall meeting of the City Council and the Working Group, the City Council directed staff to explore design options that integrate Matadero Creek as an open space feature into the NVCAP plan and enhance its connection to Boulware Park ([Meeting Minutes](#)). This type of analysis requires specialized expertise in hydrological processes, engineering and design, as well as an understanding of the regulatory process involving multiple regional entities. To implement this action, City hired consulting firm Wetlands Research Associates WRA to evaluate the feasibility of three levels of naturalization and improvements to the creek and to develop three conceptual designs of the improvements. The naturalization scenarios include (1) full naturalization of Matadero creek, (2) partial naturalization of the creek, (3) partial naturalization within the boundaries of the creek easement. The design of the scenarios is informed by hydrologic and hydraulic models to ensure decreased flood risks and identify all mitigation measures required to be incorporated into the design options.

Currently the existing portion of the Matadero Creek in the plan area has no public access, no geomorphic functions, poor habitat, and poor aesthetic conditions. Additional constraints such as the existing groundwater contamination plume, Santa Clara Valley Water District requirements, and regulations for maintenance and access to the creek, and high cost of the land of the area can act as impediments to full and functional development of the Creek options. Following are brief descriptions of the draft three alternatives proposed. An unaddressed Alternative "0" is a no change scenario.

Alternative One includes work within the boundaries of the existing Valley Water easement from Lambert Avenue to Park Boulevard, about 60 feet in width. This alternative proposes new vertical walls and replacement of the existing concrete channel with an earthen channel bottom. The creek banks would either be made of driven steel piles or concrete walls which could be beautified. The earthen channel bottom could have riparian plantings, willows and trees growing. The flood risks would be mitigated by the construction of flood walls along the top of the corridor. There would be allowances for public access to reach into the creek channel. This option proposes to expand into the Valley Water easement property only.

Alternative Two proposes to add more aesthetics and amenities to the creek site by laying back the left bank facing downstream through the 340 Portage parcel, and creating some nice opportunities for ornamental plantings, aesthetically pleasing landscape architecture, walking paths, public access, benches etc. The bottom width of the channel would be the same as Alternative One and would have the same flood wall requirements to manage flood risks. The overall corridor width proposed is about 85

feet, additional 25 feet wider than the Valley Water easement. The additional space on the left bank can be utilized for a path and more plantings to beautify the creek area. The concept of Alternative Two can be expanded to 2A to include additional walking path to Boulware Park upstream to connect two sections. The meandering channel bottom would provide natural stream morphology and in-stream habitat features.

Alternative Three proposes greater width for the creek; a living creek to maximize ecological functions and transform the corridor as a public amenity. This option will have vertical walls that are similar to Alternative One but spaced even further apart, allowing for the creek to meander from wall to wall not to be constrained or confined. This alternative will have the same features of maintenance access ramps, public access with walking trails and other beautification measures. The really wide corridor approximately 100 feet would replace Lambert Bridge and Park Boulevard Bridge, with features not to constrain the flow and the whole natural corridor with hydraulic structures. This option would require acquisition of significant real estate properties along the corridor. This proposes further expansion than Alternative 2A, allowing the channel to meander much further, much more riparian planting, replacing Lambert Bridge and actually creating allowing for flow all the way through.

These proposals require further refinement. Information from the hydraulic modeling will be added to the final proposals along with suggestions and feedback from the Santa Clara Valley Water District Office.

Open Space within NVCAP

Apart from seeking feedback from the Commission on the Matadero Creek study, planning staff also seeks input from the Commission on the open space components of the plan. At present, the plan area is served by two parks; Boulware Park and Sarah Wallis Park. The City's recent purchase of the 27,829 square feet property on 3350 Birch Street in May 2019 is proposed for expansion of the Boulware Park. This expansion would bring total Boulware Park area to 2.1 acres.

City staff along with the NVCAP Working Group is developing three draft alternatives for the plan area. The proposed drafts take into consideration an appropriate mix of housing, retail and office uses along with proper circulation and open space requirements to create a livable neighborhood. Each draft alternative proposes a range of creative open spaces. Addition of creative open spaces and expansion of Boulware Park, proposal will allow the City to meet the standards set forth by Policy C4.6¹ of the

¹ Policy C-4.6 Use the National Recreation and Park Association Standards as guidelines for locating and developing new parks. These guidelines are as follows:

- Neighborhood parks should be at least two (2) acres in size, although sites as small as ½-acre may be needed as supplementary facilities. The maximum service area radius should be ½-mile. Two acres of neighborhood park land should be provided for each 1,000 people.
- District parks should be at least five (5) acres in size. The maximum service area radius should be one (1) mile. Two acres of district park land should be provided for each 1,000 people.
- A park should be provided within walking distance of all residential neighborhoods and employment areas. The National Recreation and Park Association define walking distance as ½-mile.

Community Services and Facilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan adopted in December 2017. The guidelines established by the National Recreation and Park Association require that neighborhood parks should be at least two acres in size, although sites as small as ½-acre may be needed as supplementary facilities. Two acres of neighborhood park land should be provided for each 1,000 people and the maximum service area radius for these parks should be ½-mile. The standards also require that a park should be provided within walking distance (half mile) of all residential neighborhoods and employment areas.

On January 21, 2020, the City, through its consultant Perkins and Will, presented the latest iteration of the draft alternatives. This includes open space components. The alternatives are attached. Open space is proposed to be provided in three categories: (1) centralized open spaces like parks, (2) greenways, (3) courtyards and green roofs.

In addition, the total acreage of the Matadero Creek easement measures 1.4 acres and would be a part of a centralized open space along the creek. The creek open space can also offer connectivity to and through Boulware Park, allowing park users to cross Lambert Avenue and enter the NVCAP area and likewise allows persons to travel from the NVCAP area into the park by foot or bicycle.

NEXT STEPS

The NVAP Working Group, city staff, and the consultants plan to hold monthly working meetings to further refine the plan through the spring of 2020. The second community workshop on the plan alternatives is scheduled to take place on February 27, 2020. The draft plan alternatives will also be reviewed by the Planning and Transportation Commission, Architectural Review Board, and Council in late spring.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As the Parks and Recreation Commission considers the open space proposals and the draft plan alternatives, City staff hope special discussion and consideration will be given to:

- (1) Reflections on the types of open spaces being proposed, including the advantages, disadvantages, and appropriateness of their location;
- (2) Trade-offs between pursuing varying levels of creek naturalization while also providing space for active and passive recreation both within the boundaries of the NVCAP and as the creek winds through Boulware Park.

The draft plan alternatives are consistent with the policies of the Community Services and Facilities Element and the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The Policy C-3.3 of the Community Services and Facilities Element encourages maintenance of existing park facilities as safe and healthy community assets; Policies C-4.2 and C-4.3 encourages locating and prioritizing potential park sites to serve all residents when preparing coordinated area plans. The proposed NVCAP project alternatives are also consistent with Policy C4.6 in following the National Recreation and Park Association requirements

of neighborhood parks. Program L4.10.1 of the Land use Element requires preparation of a coordinated area plan for the North Ventura neighborhood with walkable neighborhood with multi-family housing, ground floor retail, a public park, creek improvements and an interconnected street grid.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A. Matadero Creek Improvement Alternatives

(These Matadero Creek Study alternatives were presented to the NVCAP Working Group Members on December 5, 2019. Updated alternatives will be presented to the PRC on January 28th)

Attachment B. NVCAP Working Group Meeting presentation on the proposed draft alternatives and open space

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