

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: DAREN ANDERSON DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE: FEBRUARY 11, 2021

SUBJECT: FOOTHILLS PARK ANNUAL PASS AND VISITOR CAPACITY LIMIT

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission recommend that City Council amend the ordinance and emergency ordinance adopted on February 1, 2021 to include an annual pass (including a fee structure) and a revised visitor capacity limit for Foothills Park.

BACKGROUND

On [November 2, 2020](#), City Council passed the following Motion ([Minutes](#)):

- A. Open Foothills Park to the general public by removing limits on non-residents, while maintaining the maximum capacity of 1,000 persons and providing residents first access to reservations for all facilities.
- B. Amend or delete outdated and duplicative code language.
- C. For the first 90 days, temporarily limit the capacity to 750 people at any one time.
- D. Return to Council and the Parks and Recreation Commission with proposals for fee, capacity, and park management/environmental integrity studies; and
- E. Direct staff to use the renaming process to consider renaming Foothills Park to Foothills Nature Preserve.

At the January 26, 2021, Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meeting, the PRC discussed several items related to Foothills Park that were referred to them by City Council (fees, discounts, rules and enforcement policies). Included in this discussion was a concern that the pending ordinance and emergency ordinance scheduled for February 1, 2021 City Council Consent Calendar (attached to [Agenda](#) Item Number 3) did not include an option for an annual pass, which could limit frequent park users from visiting the park if they must pay a daily entrance fee each time they visit. The PRC also discussed the limitation on number of visitors allowed in the park at one time, which the emergency ordinance limits to 400 people, not to exceed a maximum of 500 people.

On February 1, 2021, City Council approved the ordinance and emergency ordinance for a \$6 vehicle entry fee and visitor limit of 400 people at one time, not to exceed 500 people for Foothills Park. The February 1, 2021 Council Consent Calendar item on the Foothills Park emergency ordinance included an [At Places Memo](#) that explained that the PRC will hold a special meeting on February 11, 2021 to discuss and recommend a fee structure for annual passes for Foothills Park entry and will discuss the 500-person maximum limit to protect the park environment and whether that may restrict visitors more than necessary. Staff will then return to City Council with the PRC's recommendations for potential action to refine Foothills Park regulations in these areas.

DISCUSSION

Visitor Capacity Limit

Staff have analyzed the impacts to the preserve since opening to the general public on December 17, 2020. The challenges with having 750 people (approximately 280 vehicles) in the preserve at one time include:

- Potentially unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists using the preserve roads, which are too narrow to safely accommodate them when many vehicles are traveling in both directions, and
- The majority of visitors try to park near the preserve entrance area, Boronda Lake, Orchard Glen Picnic Area, and Vista Hill, which results in people parking and walking in inappropriate locations causing damage to natural areas and creating potentially unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Staff estimate that with current activity levels at different portions of Foothills Park, approximately 500 people or 200 vehicles would allow for better preserve management and visitor safety. This figure of 500 people or 200 vehicles are in addition to those persons/vehicles entering with facility reservations. The reservable areas of Foothills Park (Towle Camp, Oak Grove Picnic Area, and the Interpretive Center Classroom) are areas where parking spaces are generally underutilized compared to those closer to the preserve entrance.

If the City Manager is authorized to adjust the attendance limits at Foothills Park below the maximum, minor adjustments to the number of visitors can be made quickly and efficiently to protect the health, safety, and welfare of preserve users; to protect the wildlife and natural resources in the preserve; and/or to account for limits in parking, facilities, or staff availability.

As of February 2, 2021, the visitor capacity at Foothills Park is 400 people at any one time. There have not been enough days to analyze the impacts from this change in the visitor limit.

Annual Pass

Santa Clara County Parks has a \$95 annual pass option. San Mateo County Parks has a \$60 annual pass option. California State Parks has a range of different annual pass options and pricing.

Staff looked at a range of pricing options for an annual pass for Foothills Park¹:

- \$65 to \$80 annual pass for non-Palo Alto residents with a 25% discount for either seniors or low-income individuals and families
- \$50 to \$60 annual pass for Palo Alto residents with a 25% discount for either seniors or low-income individuals and families

Parks and Recreation Commission Foothills Park Ad Hoc Committee

¹ Senior is 60 years of age or greater. Low-income is based on Santa Clara County's adoption of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) income guidelines. Note that whatever fees are selected, the resident rate cannot be more than 25% less than the corresponding non-Palo Alto resident rate

Staff met with the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) Ad Hoc Committee (Committee) on February 2, 2021 to discuss annual pass pricing structure and the visitor capacity limit. The Committee recommends providing a 25% discount on the annual pass for active military personnel and veterans, seniors, and people who qualify as low-income.

The Committee feels that the upper range of the annual pass pricing structure that staff had suggested² is too expensive given that it is an annual pass for just one preserve, and that the high price may deter people from visiting the preserve.

The Committee recommends the following pricing structure for annual passes for residents and non-residents with respective discounts rounded to whole dollars:

- \$65 annual pass for non-Palo Alto residents
- \$49 annual pass for senior, low income, or active military and veteran non-Palo Alto residents
- \$50 annual pass for Palo Alto residents
- \$38 annual pass for senior, low income, or active military and veteran Palo Alto residents

The Committee feels that this pricing structure is reasonable and would help incentivize the purchase of annual passes which create efficient process for vehicles entering the preserve.

The Committee agrees that a visitor limit of 500 people at any one time would be an appropriate number of visitors to manage the preserve. They noted that this limit may also be helpful in ensuring that we don't exceed the capacity of preserve amenities like restrooms, picnic tables, etc.

TENTATIVE TIMELINE

- On Feb. 11, the Parks and Recreation Commission recommends an annual pass pricing structure and visitor limit to City Council
- On Feb. 22, the Parks and Recreation Commission recommendation will go to Council as part of a late-packet submittal. If Council votes to approve the Commission recommendation as an amendment to the emergency ordinance or as a new emergency ordinance, it would take effect immediately. If the Council votes to approve the recommendation only as a regular ordinance, it would require two readings and become effective 31 days after second reading.
- On Saturday, Feb. 27, Open Space staff would begin collecting the vehicle entry fee on weekends and holidays (this would include the \$6 daily vehicle entry fee, and an annual pass option if Council approves).
- The timeline for charging weekday vehicle entry fees is still undetermined, but likely in Spring 2021.

² Staff suggested

- \$80 annual pass for non-Palo Alto residents.
- \$60 annual pass for senior, low income, or active military and veteran non-Palo Alto residents.
- \$60 annual pass for Palo Alto residents.
- \$45 annual pass for senior, low income, or active military and veteran Palo Alto residents.