



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 5507)

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**Report Type: Study Session**

**Meeting Date: 8/31/2015**

**Summary Title: Update on the City-wide Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

**Title: Study Session Updating the Current Status of the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Recreation Master Planning Process**

**From: City Manager**

**Lead Department: Public Works**

### **Recommendation**

This is an informational report as background to the study session on the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Recreation Facilities Master Plan; no Council action is required.

This report provides a status update on the Parks Master Planning process, which has been underway since January 2014.

The Study Session provides an opportunity for City Council discussion regarding the overall master plan. Members of the planning team will present key results of the public input and analysis completed to date. Discussion items for the council will focus on the draft principles and criteria that are being used to develop, evaluate and sort the potential improvements to the system.

### **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 Baylands Nature Preserve. Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project PE-13003 Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Recreation Master Plan (master plan) was adopted by Council in the Fiscal Year 2013 budget process. The purpose of this project is to provide the necessary analysis and review of Palo Alto's parks and recreation system and to prepare 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 for our recreational, programming, environmental, and maintenance needs. It will establish a prioritized schedule of future park renovations and facility improvements.

A request for proposals was drafted by city staff and the PRC and released in Fall 2013. Proposals were received and the consulting firm, MIG Inc., was selected and began work in January 2014.

Currently MIG is in the second phase of the process, analyzing the collected data, prioritizing the improvements and developing recommendations. The consultant has provided a status summary (Attachment A). All analysis, reports and presentation materials created for the master plan can be found on the City of Palo Alto projects web page at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/parksplan](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/parksplan).

## **Discussion**

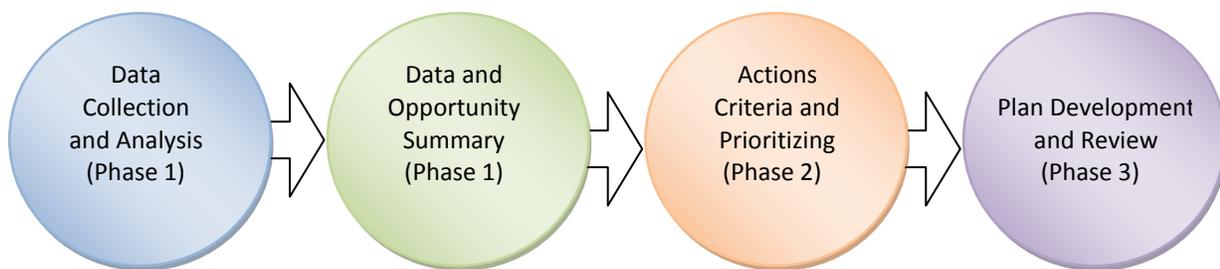
The objective of this master plan process is to assess the short, medium and long-term needs for development and improvement of existing parks, open space areas, regional trails and recreation facilities and the acquisition of new parkland and/or expansion of existing parkland to meet on-going needs of the community. The master plan is divided into three phases of work: phase one, encompassing data collection and analysis; phase two, documenting and prioritizing recommendations; and phase three, the drafting the master plan and gaining Council approval and adoption with community input

The first phase of this process included an analysis of existing parks, open spaces and recreation programs and facilities that involved extensive community outreach, including an on-line survey reaching over 1,100 participants, various focus groups and community stakeholders. An analysis of demographics, sustainability opportunities and recreation programs with input from staff, the consultants and the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) resulted in the creation of a 'Data and Opportunities Summary Matrix' that references back to the extensive data referenced in a binder for each of the PRC members and staff. The information in the Data Summary Matrix will be utilized during the second phase of the project, which is currently underway.

The second phase includes documenting and prioritizing many factors including: community needs, future growth demands, projected costs and possible funding options. This phase is expected to be complete in the fall of 2015 and began with the formulation of principles that will guide the prioritizing and recommendation process. The formulation of recommendations will draw from the various interested parties, including community members, stakeholder groups, city boards and commissions, city staff and the Council. At this point in the process, we are moving from the Data and Needs Summary Phase (Phase 1) to the Actions, Criteria and Prioritizing Phase (Phase 2).

The third and final phase of the project will focus on drafting and finalizing the master plan report.

*Figure 1: Data to Recommendations Diagram*



A key component to Phase 2 and the overall master plan’s framework is the development of principles derived from the patterns, themes and priorities expressed by the Palo Alto community in public engagement activities. The principles dictate the overarching strategic direction for the system of parklands, protected places and recreation programs spanning the next 25 years. With PRC and Council input, these principles will be used to guide decision-making.

Although this update is primarily intended to inform the Council of the process to date and provide a timeline for future involvement, staff would like to take this opportunity to introduce the seven principles as well as introducing the draft prioritization criteria that are currently under development.

The master plan’s seven principles are provided below. The principles were derived from extensive public input, and discussions with the Parks and Recreation Commission:

- **Playful**, inspiring imagination and joy;
- **Healthy**, supportive of the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals as well as the connectedness and cohesion of the community;
- **Sustainable**, stewarding natural, economic and social resources for a system that endures;
- **Inclusive** of the entire Palo Alto community, all ages, abilities, languages, cultures, and levels of income;
- **Accessible**, easy for all people to use year-round and to get to by all modes of travel;
- **Flexible** enough to accommodate multiple uses across time with adaptable spaces that can accommodate traditional, emerging and future uses; and
- **Balanced** between natural spaces and manicured landscapes, historic elements and cutting-edge features, and self-directed and programmed activities.

The principles are a tool for decision-making as we begin identifying actions and recommendations for the plan. The table below presents screening questions to consider in weighting alternative approaches to meeting a particular need and to prioritize actions.

Principle	Does the action/project/idea:
Playful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up opportunities for creative use of the space?</li> <li>• Introduce imagination, whimsy and the unexpected?</li> <li>• Encourage unstructured free-play opportunities?</li> </ul>
Healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and encourage everyday physical activity?</li> <li>• Provide a place to unwind?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create spaces where families, neighbors and meet and interact?</li> </ul>
Sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight and enhance unique ecosystems, habitats or natural features?</li> <li>• Minimize ongoing maintenance costs to achieve quality experiences?</li> <li>• Adapt the system to climate change, drought, sea level rise, and other future challenges?</li> <li>• Consider existing facilities, providers or places before building new?</li> </ul>
Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeal to an underrepresented user group?</li> <li>• Respond to the unique character of neighborhoods and areas of Palo Alto?</li> </ul>
Accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce or remove barriers to participation/enjoyment based on physical or mental ability?</li> <li>• Fill holes in close to home access to an essential activity?</li> <li>• Extend the recreation experience or activity to a new audience or user group in Palo Alto?</li> <li>• Support bike and pedestrian networks or connections to nearby facilities?</li> </ul>
Flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support new types of activities on a site or in the system without eliminating existing popular activities?</li> <li>• Make it easier to adapt to a new trend?</li> <li>• Avoid dedicating a significant area to a single use?</li> </ul>
Balanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the balance that already exists system-wide?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Result in a better balance at an individual site or cluster of sites?</li> </ul>
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The planning process also includes a prioritization step that involves applying criteria to the recommended actions to sort them into an action plan. These criteria will include practical matters such as cost and funding availability as well as community preferences. The action plan will detail where the City should be focusing in the short, medium and long-term, while allowing for some flexibility to respond to opportunities and urgent needs. Currently, a PRC Ad hoc committee as well as the full Parks and Recreation Commission are working on drafting these criteria. A working **draft** version includes the following criteria:

- Community Preference: top priorities from community input
- Addressing Existing Gaps: fills an identified geographic, activity or service gap in the system
- Responding to Growth: evolves the system to accommodate projected growth, demographic and activity changes
- Resource Impacts: capital and operations implications and opportunities
- Multiple Benefits: advances more than one of the master plan’s principles

### **Timeline**

The master planning process was initiated in January 2014 and is expected to be completed in Summer of 2016. A draft of the master plan will be developed for comment in late Fall 2015. Through vetting with boards and commissions and City Council a final draft will be produced. Staff expects to present the final draft to Council for approval in Spring 2016.

### **Resource Impact**

Funding for this project is provided by Capital Improvement Program project PE-13003, Parks, Trails, Open Space and Recreation Master Plan.

### **Policy Implications**

The proposed master plan is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Policy C-26 of the Community Services and Facilities element which 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. The Comprehensive Plan Policy C-28 sets guidelines based on the National Recreation and Parks Association Standards for locating and developing new parks. This standard is being reevaluated given the difficulty to develop new parks within the City.

### **Environmental Review**

This is a planning study and therefore exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review pursuant to Section 15262 of the CEQA guidelines.

Before improvement projects and recommendations are implemented as capital improvement projects, an environmental assessment will be completed in conformance with the provisions of CEQA.

#### **Attachments:**

- Palo Alto PTOSR Council Update June 2015 (DOCX)



**To:** Palo Alto City Council, Peter Jensen and Elizabeth Ames

**Cc:** Daren Anderson and Rob de Geus

**From:** Ryan Mottau, Lauren Schmitt and Ellie Fiore, MIG

**Re:** Project Update for City Council

**Date:** August 12, 2015

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Since the last Council presentation on the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Recreation Master Plan (PTOSR Plan), the project team has developed the system and needs analysis through data collection, community outreach, stakeholder engagement and collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC).

The first phase of work was focused on assessing the physical and programmatic system followed by a multi-pronged community outreach effort. Recent work has been focused on a comprehensive review of data collected and analyzed to date.

This data summary will directly inform future recommendations and projects to be reviewed by the PRC, community and Council. MIG, working with staff, has presented a matrix of data and resulting needs to the PRC at their April meeting. Moving forward, the success with creating this comprehensive reference product will help the planning team and the PRC in developing and reviewing recommendations.

This informational update provides a review of work completed to date, an overview of the current status of the project and a discussion of the next steps and project schedule.

### **Community Outreach**

Guided by the Public Engagement Plan developed at the outset of this planning process, and with support of the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC), MIG successfully solicited detailed input and ideas from hundreds of community members through a variety of methods including:

- Online community survey (over 1,100 responses)
- Online map-based survey (over 475 individuals)
- Community workshops (3)
- On-the-ground “intercept events” (6)
- Stakeholder advisory group meeting

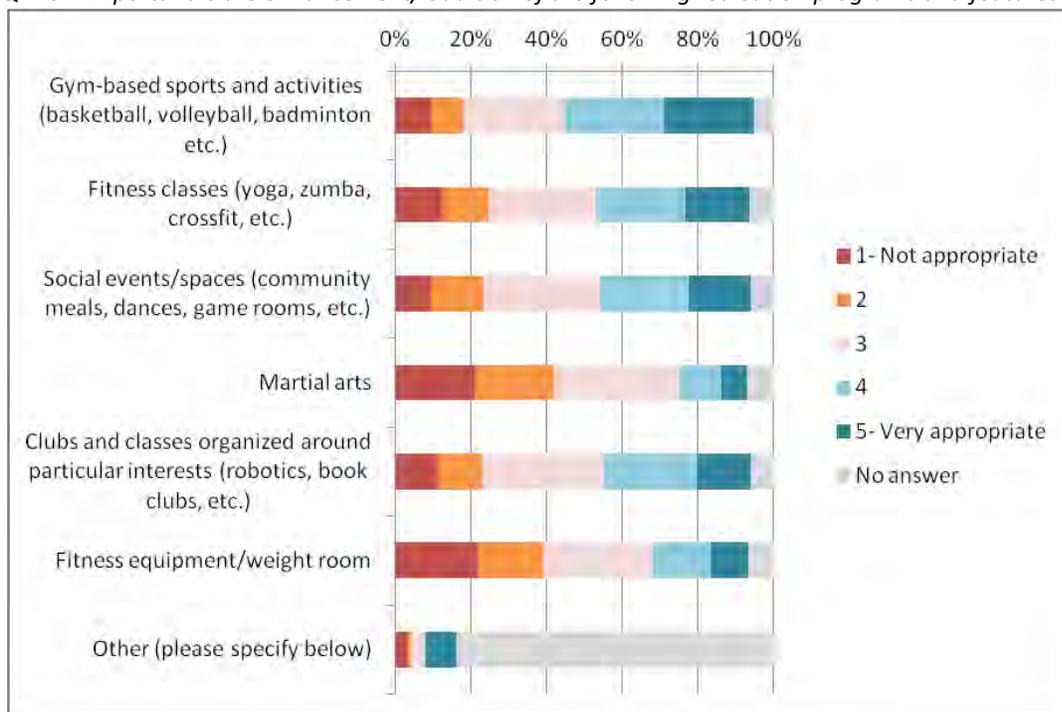
- Meetings with community-based organizations and representatives

Events and input opportunities were promoted in a variety of ways, including the City newsletter, website and social media accounts; e-Blasts to the community services mailing list, stakeholder advisory group, and community-based organizations; and with flyers and signs in parks. Intercept boards and in-park signage included a QR code that took users directly to the Mapita questionnaire. Community workshops were also promoted with newspaper ads and on public access television and PRC members were asked to promote input opportunities through their own networks. The project website ([www.paloaltoparksplan.org](http://www.paloaltoparksplan.org)) includes updates, document downloads and links to the online questionnaires.

### Community Survey

MIG worked with the City Staff Project Team to launch an online community survey to better understand community priorities. The survey was based on earlier input from the community and the analysis of the system. The PRC and Staff Project Team reviewed the survey and it was available online from November 17 through December 19, 2014. It was also available in hard copy in Spanish and in English.

*Q: How important is the enhancement/ addition of the following recreation programs and features in Palo Alto?*



### Community Stakeholder Meetings

MIG has met with several community-based organizations, parks and recreation interest groups and other interested community members to identify key needs, assets and opportunities for the Plan and to build the network of community members engaged in the process.

### *Community Workshops*

MIG facilitated a series of three community workshops, on October 28, 29 and December 2, 2014 that engaged a total of 60 community members. These workshops provided residents with an opportunity to provide more specific input on aspects of the system that they would like preserved or improved.

### *Online Interactive Map Tool*

Using the web-based Mapita application, community members were able to answer a series of questions and provide geo-tagged comments on specific parks and locations throughout the City. Over 475 individuals provided park-specific feedback using this tool. Extensive comments on park quality, barriers to access, needs and opportunities for dozens of parks were collected. Comments on every City park were received using this interactive tool.

### *Stakeholder Advisory Group*

A Stakeholder Advisory Group was convened in the summer of 2014. This group of approximately 30 community members represents a diverse range of interests and community groups in Palo Alto. The first of three meetings with this group was held in June to introduce the Plan; discuss issues, needs and opportunities; and identify community engagement opportunities.

### *Intercept Events*

A unique element of this project was the use of intercept events in which MIG staff and PRC members engaged visitors outdoors at parks, farmers markets and community events. PRC members were able to extend MIG's reach of this effort and overall, six intercepts captured comments from over 200 people. A summary of the input received from the intercept events is available on the project website.



## Analysis of the Community and the System

Working closely with City staff and the PRC, MIG has developed several products that document and analyze the existing parks, trails, recreation and open space assets in Palo Alto as well as the policy and demographic environments in which the Plan is being developed.

Early work was focused on the inventory of parks and facilities, other related City efforts and the demographic analysis of the community. More recent and ongoing work on analysis of the system includes evaluation of recreation program options; site evaluation of each park in the system; a revenue analysis; a high-level sustainability review of policies, practices and operations; and a geographic analysis to identify any gaps in the system.

The following interim work products were developed by MIG, reviewed by staff and the PRC and are (or will be) posted to the project website

### *Planning Environment Summary*

This document includes a review of guiding documents, related plans and programs, and city policies and practices. The Summary reveals facility and program gaps identified by past planning efforts for consideration in the PTOSR planning process.

### *Sustainability Review*

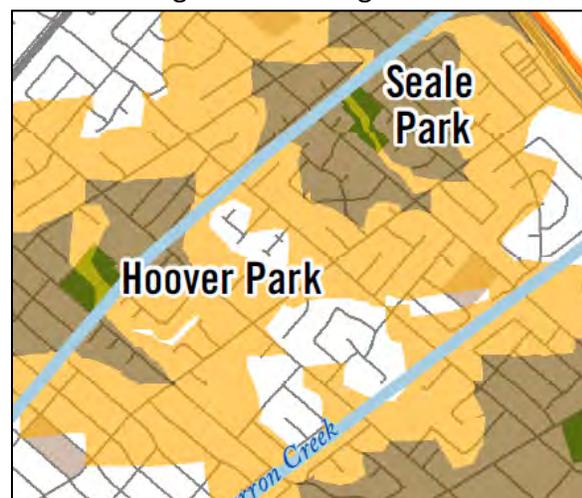
This work product identifies opportunities to increase sustainable practices associated with the operation and management of parks and open space within the City. Drawing on best practices from other cities and agencies, the site tour and inventory findings and staff input, the Sustainability Review evaluates the City's current policies, programs and practices and identifies opportunities to increase sustainability across 13 indicators.

### *Program Review and Analysis*

This working draft document makes recommendations for high-level strategic directions and key findings about Palo Alto's programming areas, populations and facilities, and identifies gaps and overlaps. The Review includes recreation programs offered by the Community Services Department as well as by private and community providers.

### *Geographic Network Analysis*

MIG used a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) model of the streets, sidewalks, trails and pathways to illustrate the geographic reach of each park, reflecting the way people move through the city. Model outputs show



Interactive Map Sample

the desired travel distance (¼ or ½ mile) to park sites and particular recreation opportunities and show where service gaps appear.

The image above shows an example of ¼ (brown) and ½ (tan) mile walking distances from parks in Palo Alto. This model was further refined using the public comments on barriers (such as busy streets and intersections), desired activities, and the paths people use to travel to and from parks. This analysis will dovetail with the extensive input from park users in Palo Alto and the project team’s review of each park site to inform recommendations and priority improvements in the next phase of the project.

**Existing Conditions Maps**

The MIG team visited each park site to document and evaluate existing conditions and consider possible improvements and developed an existing conditions map for each of the City’s parks that includes key features, opportunities and constraints and site-specific public input.

**Data and Needs Summary**

During Spring 2015 the planning team has been working closely with the Parks and Recreation Commission to review the extensive data generated from the planning process and brought in from other City and community efforts. This work has culminated in the Data and Needs Summary Matrix and a comprehensive binder of all data sources identified by the planning team. These two tools provide the reference material for developing recommendations that are supported directly by the data sources.

**Next Steps and Estimated Timeline**

Online Prioritization Exercise	Summer-Fall 2015
Community Workshops:	Fall 2015
Draft Plan:	Winter 2015
Council and PRC Review:	Pending Council and Commission schedules