



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 5263)

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**Report Type: Study Session**

**Meeting Date: 11/10/2014**

**Summary Title: Council Study Session with Parks and Recreation Commission**

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**From: City Manager**

**Lead Department: Community Services**

**Attachments:**

- A - November 10-2014 (PDF)
- Parks and Recreation Commission 2014 - A Look Back - for Council ver 2 (PDF)
- 7.7 acres City Council study session REV (PDF)



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CITY COUNCIL AND PARKS AND RECREATION  
COMMISSION STUDY SESSION MEETING  
**November 10, 2014**

Palo Alto Civic Center  
Council Conference Room  
6:00 PM Meeting  
250 Hamilton Avenue

- I. ROLL CALL
- II. AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, DELETIONS
- III. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

*Members of the public are invited to address the commission on any subject not on the agenda. A reasonable time restriction may be imposed at the discretion of the Chair. The Commission reserves the right to limit oral communications period to 15 minutes.*

IV. BUSINESS

Below are the potential topics of discussion for the joint study session with the Public Art Commission scheduled for November 10, 2014 at 6:00 PM:

- 1) Highlights from the past year
- 2) Current Park and Recreation Commission policy matters under review:
  - Possible use of newly dedicated 7.7 acres at Foothills Park
  - Exploration of shared use dog parks
  - Parks and Recreation Master Plan
  - Park and Recreation capital improvement planning
  - Other
- 3) Council question

# **Parks and Recreation Commission**

## **A Look Back at 2014**

### Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The Commission has been very active with the plans and initial research being conducted by the outside consultant (*MIG*) on the Master Plan. We met in March in a joint session of Council to hear from MIG for the first time. Subsequently, each commissioner has been involved in some aspect of the research to date - from citizen intercept surveys to participating at public workshops for input of ideas. We have also heard twice from the consultant via formal presentations at Commission meetings and provided feedback regarding the presentation and sufficiency of data.

### Park Improvement Projects

- + El Camino Park - Reviewed options and held public outreach regarding the addition of field lighting to El Camino Park to substantially increase the playing time on the new fields. Recommended to Council the approval of the complete park PIO. (More extensive analysis and review by ad hoc committee and full commission was undertaken in 2012 and 2013).
- + Scott Park – Reviewed design and public comment in ad hoc committee, attended citizen outreach sessions and heard multiple readings with public input at Commission meetings – substantially around the bocce ball court issue. Recommended to Council the approval of a PIO including bocce ball court.
- + Reviewed Hopkins, Monroe, and Bowden Parks design recommendations. After multiple review meetings and design adjustments, recommended approval of a PIO for each.
- + Reviewed proposed design for Byxbee Park Trails and assigned ad hoc committee to follow up on questions and concerns.

- + Reviewed design and progress of Magical Bridge Playground and recommended approval of a PIO.

### Municipal Golf Course

- + Commission ad hoc committee met extensively with staff and stakeholders group on the issue of tree mitigation for lost trees due to construction of new Baylands Golf Course. Commission approved a committee recommendation for three acres of Baylands restoration and recommended same to Council.

- + Commission recommended to Council the approval of the draft EIR and PIO for the creation of the new Baylands Golf Course.

### New Initiatives

- + With high citizen demand for off-leash dog run areas, and limited dedicated space for this purpose, the commission is investigating the feasibility of shared use dog parks and the development of a pilot proposal to recommend to Council. An ad hoc committee is well along on the investigation.

- + Full Commission took a walking tour of the 7.7 acres in Foothill Park subsequently reclassified as Palo Alto parkland. Preliminary consideration of potential uses of this space is being considered at ad hoc level.

- + Ad hoc committee is actively redesigning and updating the PARC website for improved public access to critical materials.

- + With staff Anderson and Keith investigated ways to improve the process for public outreach to residents to better inform them of parks and recreation issues and to increase attendance at public meetings for the consideration of changing neighborhood park facilities. New protocol for email notification to citizens is in process.

- + Discussed and approved Memorandum to Council regarding impacts of growth on parks and recreation resources and urging Council to measure those impacts and ensure that plans for future growth reflect a commitment by the City to

promote expansion and maintain the quality and health of our parks, recreation and open space resources.

### Other Issues

- + Prioritized CIPs for coming year via an ad hoc committee in conjunction with staff Betts, DeGeus, and Anderson.
- + Provided positive feedback to Council on “Know Your Neighbors Grant Program.” Recommended the continuance and expansion of grants in coming years for wider outreach.
- + Reviewed and, after significant revisions and multiple presentations to the full Commission, recommended approval of Urban Forest Master Plan.
- + Considered changes and improvements to the Community Gardens program. Ad hoc committee continues work on developing proposed changes.
- + After multiple meetings for consideration and public comment, unanimously recommended approval of municipal code amendment to restrict feeding of wildlife and feral animals.
- + Supported and attended Cogswell Plaza dedication to honor redwood grove memorial for fallen Palo Alto police officers.
- + Reviewed the design competition process for 101/Adobe Creek Pedestrian-Bicycle Overpass.
- + Ad hoc committee began investigation of opportunities for improvements to Baylands Interpretive Center and Sterling Canal.

**TO: City Council**

**FROM: 7.7 Acre Parcel at Foothills Park - Ad Hoc Committee, Parks and Recreation Commission**

**DATE: November 10, 2014**

**SUBJECT: Working Paper on 7.7 ACRE PARCEL AT Foothills Park**

The Parks and Recreation Commission has assigned an Ad Hoc committee to facilitate the development of ideas for specific land use options of the newly dedicated 7.7 acres in Foothills Park. The fact sheet below has our findings thus far including public comments, a site map and an Acterra Native Plant Nursery fact sheet. We want to discuss this learning with the Council and gather the Council's thoughts and ideas so we can proceed forward in providing suggested land use recommendations.

**Background of the 7.7 Acres/Current Land Leases:**

The 7.7 acres was not part of the original Foothills Park. The 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.

The City had a lease/agreement for use of the land from 1996 to 2013 to the private resident who owns the three neighboring parcels.

Acterra Native Plant Nursery has leased a portion of the parcel from the City (.53 acres) since 2003. Acterra's Lease Agreement expires in 2015 and can be renewed by mutual consent of Acterra and the City.

**Current Soil Conditions**

The 7.7 acres parcel is a former quarry site. The hillside on the north side (right side as you enter the property) is composed of poor soils and spoils from the quarry. The valley floor (flat part of the parcel which represents approximately 2.1 acres) is the same quarry spoils with poor soil and deposited creek sediments. We estimate that the flat part of the parcel (2.1 acres) has an estimated 5 feet deep of this poor soil/sediment.

**Buckeye Creek**

Buckeye Creek originates in Foothills Park at the upper end of Wildhorse Valley and splits the 7.7 acres. Buckeye Creek was channelized before the 1950's and significant additional channelization occurred upstream of the 7.7 acres after floods in 1983. As a result, a lot of sedimentation occurs and collects in the creek. The creek flattens out through the 2.1 acre section of the parcel and this is where the major

sedimentation collects during the rainy season. Collected sediments must be removed 2 to 3 times every year to prevent flooding. The removal is especially important before the creek flows through culverts at the end of the 7.7 acres (back right hand side of property). This is the last opportunity to clear the sedimentation before heading into the cavernous culverts downstream.

The private resident whose property borders the 7.7 acres has managed the creek sediment removal process up until now at his cost. The City will now be responsible for that work unless an agreement between the City and the private resident is obtained.

The culvert noted above is approximately 7 feet below the valley floor of the parcel. (back right hand side of property) It is extremely dangerous to any wildlife and/or person who might venture down into it. Safety precautions must be taken to secure this culvert from easy public access.

Due to Buckeye Creek's size and the mostly undeveloped watershed, it should serve as high quality habitat for steelhead and other wildlife. However, since a significant portion of the creek is channelized and deeply incised, it has an increased slope resulting in a high stream velocity. This accelerates erosion and prevents the formation of pools and riffles needed for good fish habitat.

A \$75,000 CIP for a hydrologic study of Buckeye Creek was proposed, but not funded last year. Such an analysis would be extremely useful in developing recommendations for proper restoration and realistic recreational uses of the parcel.

### **Easements and Other Restrictions**

The 7.7 acres includes an easement for an emergency ingress and egress road that runs through the parcel to Los Trancos Road. This easement must be maintained for emergency response and evacuation of Foothills Park.

Development is limited next to Buckeye Creek. Environmental regulations preclude any permanent structures or parking lots within 50 feet of the creek. (The 50 feet is measured from the bank side of Creek.)

The 7.7 acres is bordered on three sides by a private residence. There is only one public entry and exit point to the 7.7 acres.

The flat area of the parcel (approximately 2.1 acres) is the only viable usable space within the total 7.7 acres. This includes the current .53 acre nursery parcel. The remaining portion of the parcel is hillsides, exclusive easements and setback from Buckeye Creek.

### **Public Outreach**

The PARC Ad Hoc worked with Staff to start the process of gathering public ideas and comments pertaining to the newly dedicated 7.7 acres. In order to begin this process we created open house tours of the acreage.

There were a total of four Ranger lead tours of the 7.7 acres and they were given on: October 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and October 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014. A total of 9 members of the public attended those tours.

A public meeting was held on October 18<sup>th</sup> with a Ranger lead tour occurring prior to the meeting. Approximately 10 people attended this tour and 27 people attended the meeting.

Each tour included the history of the site as well as discussion of the challenges/restrictions associated with the 7.7 acres (as described above).

The public meeting held on October 18<sup>th</sup> was facilitated and run by Daren Anderson, Division Manager City of Palo Alto Open Space, Parks and Golf and Lester Hendrie, Supervising Ranger, Palo Alto Open Space. Members of the PARC Ad Hoc were also present at the public meeting as well as representatives from Acterra.

Both Mr. Anderson and Ranger Hendrie presented the facts about the 7.7 acres and then opened the meeting up to public suggestions and comments.

A complete list of all of the public's comments and suggested land usage is attached to this fact sheet. The major themes that came out of the tours and public meeting are the following:

**Theme 1.** Restoration

**Theme 2.** Additions to current recreational activities in Foothills Park including campsite, picnicking area, structure for special events and an off leash dog area.

**Theme 3.** Keep Acterra and add a possible additional environmental partner for shared use. (See attached Acterra fact sheet)

### **Next Steps**

As you can see, the 7.7 acre parcel presents several physical and legal challenges that will constrain future improvements. While it is exciting to add this new acreage to our parkland inventory, any future plans for the site must take into account current conditions and the potentially significant costs of restoration.

The PARC Ad Hoc will meet with Staff to discuss all comments and suggestions emerging from the Council-Commission study session. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan will also provide valuable insight to any functions that we may be currently underserving in our park and recreation system.



After integrating the Council and public comments as well as the Master Plan research, we will create an action plan for the PARC and Staff to develop land use recommendations to Council for the 7.7 acres. We look forward to developing an appropriate and sustainable plan for use of the site over the next year.

## ATTACHMENT A

### PUBLIC COMMENTS/SUGGESTED USES OF 7.7 ACRES OCTOBER 2014

1. Open sided building for various special events. Ideally allowing horses. It would bring more people into the park. Possible uses could include hayrides, weddings, etc. The fact that there is a large flat area is a positive.
2. Note that the 5' of overburden soil (this is the material that was excavated from the adjacent quarry) that was placed on the 7.7 acres limits the restoration options. The overburden material is not good for growing plants. Alternatives to restoration should be considered. It would take a lot of effort to restore. Bounded with only one entry is also a challenge. We need to think outside the box.
3. The flat area is good thing. It would be a good location for a primitive campground with limited amenities. We could use the existing amenities, such as the restrooms at Oak Grove and the parking near Oak Grove picnic area.
4. Move the existing park maintenance building into the 7.7 acre area, and restore the site where the maintenance building is currently sitting. The maintenance yard is the entry to this space, and the entry should be attractive.
5. All options considered for this space should retain the Acterra nursery, and build on access to the nursery. The nursery should be instructional, not just commercial. (someone notes that classes of children do visit the nursery).
6. There are numerous benefits of the nursery, and it should be maintained on site.
7. There should be a placeholder for option of including a Canopy tree nursery at the site.
8. It would be great if there is public access into this area through Los Trancos Road. Don't do anything that would preclude or prevent future connectivity through this site to the rest of Foothills Park.
9. Restore original creek. Consider removing the overburden soil and restoring the area to one contiguous valley. It would take a long time, but with time and grants it is possible.
10. Leave the site alone. Just add a simple trail.
11. Concern about emergency exit from the park. How is an individual inside the park supposed to escape the area if there is a gate that can only be opened by emergency response staff?
12. Acterra nursery should be allowed to stay on the site because it is a benefit to the City.

13. Make sure this issue is covered by the press (Weekly). It will ensure that more people are aware of the discussion.
14. The Parks Master Plan may identify needs that cannot be met with our existing space in the park system. Keep this area open for needs that are identified in the Master Plan.
15. Keep Acterra Nursery on the site.
16. Support the Acterra Nursery and expand the stewardship and educational opportunities.
17. Use the area for athletic fields.
18. Question about how often the campground and group picnic area are booked? (Staff explained that during summer weekends the campground and group picnic area are fully booked.)
19. Camping could be a great use for this site.
20. Cabin camping with platforms would be a good use for the site. It would increase winter camping.
21. Consider removing the eucalyptus trees from the site.
22. Adding something like the Oak Grove Picnic Area and including some new trees.
23. Include placeholders for connectivity.
24. Restoration could bring lots of grant money.
25. Canopy tree nursery
26. Creek restoration concept. There are lots of grants for this kind of work.
27. Improve the soil and let nature take its course. Remember, this is a nature preserve.
28. Respect the neighbors to this site. Need to take into account noise issues for whatever is considered for this area. You wouldn't put a campground right next to other neighbors' homes anywhere else in the park system, so why would you do it in this situation.
29. Bike trail thru to Los Trancos Road.

## **ATTACHMENT B**

### **Acterra Nursery Facts**

The Acterra Native Plant Nursery has been in operation since 1996 and located on the current site since 2003. Acterra is a Palo Alto non-profit organization engaged in various activities intended to protect and enhance our local environment.

- The current lease for the nursery site expires in 2015 and can be renewed for another five years by mutual agreement between Acterra and the City of Palo Alto. In lieu of a cash rental payment for the nursery, Acterra provides the City with \$10,000 in value per year consisting of plants, materials and volunteer restoration services. Acterra meters and pays for all the nursery water usage. Electricity is generated on site via solar panels.
- The entire nursery, including all structures, the solar electric system and water line was built from the ground up by volunteers frequently using their own tools and employing donated and salvaged materials whenever possible.
- The nursery is staffed by one full-time and one part-time Acterra employee assisted by several regular volunteers. Staff duties extend beyond nursery operation to include related activities such as seed collecting and restoration consulting.
- Specializing in plants grown from local wild-collected propagules, the nursery grows about 150 species and more than 30,000 plants annually, some of which are endangered and difficult to propagate.
- The nursery provides all plants used in Acterra Stewardship program restoration projects, as well as being a key supplier of plants for other local public agencies such as the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District. For example, the nursery is the primary plant supplier for Mt. Umunhum Restoration.
- In Palo Alto alone, Acterra Stewardship provided 10,000 volunteer hours of habitat restoration and installed more than 14,500 nursery plants at seven different sites last year.
- The primary focus of the nursery is growing plants for wild land restoration. It also serves commercial and residential landscapers who wish to install water wise eco-friendly plants. The nursery pioneered the lawn replacement concept. Local schools, parks, demonstration gardens and rural farmers also use plants from the nursery.
- The nursery attracts an abundance of birds, butterflies, native bees, and other wildlife. We are especially proud of our large tree frog population. We facilitate the hatching of hundreds of tree frogs each year.



Los Trancos Road

Arrillaga Residence

7.7 acre parcel (approximate)

Buckeye Creek

Emergency Evacuation Route

Fence

Gate

Fence

Acterra Nursery

Property Manager Residence

Foothills Park Maintenance Yard