

Notes from 7/15/2011
Park and Recreation Commission Meeting
Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan Update

Objective: The goal of the update was to open a dialogue with the community and the Parks and Recreation Commission Goals and Objectives for vegetation management portion of the updated Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan. The updated plan concentrates on vegetation management with an emphasis on fire prevention measures.

Presentation

Tony Wolcott, City Albany Urban Forester introduced the project consultant Cheryl Miller, RLA. The team includes 3 members in addition to Ms. Miller, a landscape architect with experience in park planning and wildland fire. Brad Gallup is a GIS specialist with forestry and wildland resource management experience, and currently a fire captain with East Bay Regional Park District. Kathy Lyons, Biotic Resources group, is a plant ecologist by training but who also provides environmental analysis and understands regulatory permitting. Dr. Richard Arnold, Entomological Consulting Services, a entomologist with specialty in monarch butterfly will support Ms. Lyons.

Ms. Miller provided an overview of the consultant work, schedule, and the base data collected to date (see attached powerpoint presentation images). The team has received the plan, city geographic information system (GIS) base data, and the city Integrated Pest Management Policy. They have also received information from two stakeholder groups the Friends of Five Creeks and Friends of Albany Hills interested in creek restoration of Creekside Park and native plants on Albany Hill.

As a starting point the team has undertaken initial site reconnaissance to evaluate how the park vegetation has changed since the 1991 plan. The GIS data allowed the team to overlay the parcel boundaries on an aerial photograph (see presentation). Since 1991 the park has increased in size by 6.6 acres with the purchase of 4 parcels using Measure R funds. Ms. Miller showed images of each of the vegetation management units identified in the 1991 plan and a draft vegetation management unit graphic of how they might be mapped today.

- Riparian – generally in same location today along Middle Creek in lower portion of park as shown in 1991. Team recommends that the area along Cerrito Creek also be included in this management unit.
- Lower grassland –a narrow band on the lower part of the park between the oak woodland and the riparian units. However the band appears much narrower. This leads to a management question of how much grassland to maintain – narrow trails or wider meadows. The grasslands will need to actively managed of the vegetation type will change with natural succession.
- Oak woodland – still in the same locations as shown in 1991. The shape of the manage unit today is different primarily because the GIS allows us to overlay the parcel boundaries and shape the units to the city owned property lines.
- Eucalyptus forest - still in locations shown on 1991 plan. The consultant team recommends that the unit be divided into three units reflecting the understory and

different approaches to fuel management. On flatter part of hill, centered on existing path is Eucalyptus with grass understory. On western slopes the vegetation below eucalyptus is north coastal scrub (mix of poison oak, blackberry, some coast live oak).

It was noted that the eucalyptus on the hill top does not seem to be vigorous – a lot of dead wood in canopy of tree. There appears to be little forest regeneration with young seedlings; but rather from resprouts of formerly cut stumps. This raises a question of long-term vision of the upper part of the forest (lower on the slopes there were some seedlings found). Actively manage – selecting for the next generation of eucalyptus trees or allow the trees to age and remove them as they become hazardous?

- Toyon Understory – the eastern side of eucalyptus forest still has Toyon understory as noted in 1991. Appears to be a wider band than shown in 1991 and includes coast live oak, poison oak, along with some exotics like cotoneaster, pine, acacia.
- The two new parcels at the end of Madison are a mix of riparian, grassland and oak woodland and appears to have been mapped as a part of the 1991 plan.
- New parcel between Taft and Jackson – the majority of this slope has eucalyptus overstory. On north and north-east facing slopes understory oak-woodland and sparse canopy of eucalyptus. East facing slopes have an understory of grassland with pockets shrubs in canopy openings (including broom). On lower eastern corner is an oak grassland (oak, buckeye) with some exotics such as pampas grass, cotoneaster, nasturtium and planted materials by roadside.

Reviewed the 4 goals in the 1991 Master plan (page 6) to confirm they still apply to the site

1. Protect, maintain and enhance natural features, native vegetation & wildlife habitats of the site.
2. Protect cultural resources
3. Improve basic services to make the site safe and accessible to all people
4. Provide simple amenities that respect the site, educate the user & allow for the appreciation and enjoyment of the site.

Reviewed key recommendations in the vegetation management portion of the plan to confirm they still apply to the site

- Protect remaining native stands (remnant oak woodland, grasslands, toyon understory & riparian ecosystems under threat from introduced and invading exotics)
- Protect rare, endangered & sensitive species
- Allow for co-existence of existing eucalyptus forest with protection of woodland and grasslands
- Removal of trees that threaten human safety due to unstable growth or serious fire danger
- Remove understory debris and fire ladders on annual basis
- Manage debris to reduce slip potential on trail between Taft & Jackson
- View shed protection- specific corridors:
 - East facing bench – view to east bay hills
 - South west facing bench – view to SF
 - West facing benches – view to Mt Tam + golden gate
 - Taft street circle – view to Mt Tamalpais
- Creek protection and restoration

- Protect wildlife diversity
- Protect archaeological resources

Additional considerations included managing vegetation to:

- Reduce fire ignitions (from roadsides, illegal camping or smoking)
- Reduce flooding (from unmanaged vegetation in creeks/ banks)
- Discourage illegal camping (potential for fire ignitions and health/ safety issues)
- Improve visibility and security (perceived and actual park user safer)
- Improve access (overgrown black berry or poison oak)

Application of City IPM policy

Incorporate education, signage and awareness activities.

Public Comments

10 speakers from the community addressed the Commission with the following comments.

Friends of Five Creeks also submitted written comments (see attached).

- There are 3 types of blackberry species in the park: native blackberry (*Rubus*, the Himalayan blackberry (*R. armeniacus* sym. *R. discolor*) and an evergreen thornless (*R. laciniatus*) on Cerrito Creek. Both of the non-native blackberries are invasive.
- Archeological report on shellmound was done as a part of the sewer replacement project.
- Google earth historic photos from 1993 show the changes in the hill since the plan was completed. The toyon show as planted on the site (even though they are native, they were not originally on the hill)
- Need for perseverance in whatever plan is adopted. The long term execution strategy is critical as nature is not static.
- What might be the impact on the park if LBNL comes to the Albany Racetrack.
- Need to coordinate efforts by police, health and fire departments to support the work non-profit groups have done in the park.
- Education needed for general public, schools to support the plan's implementation.
- Resident who has lived on Albany hill since 1961 remembers many monarch butterflies in the south west part of the park. More recently there have been some but not the number or size. Also the grasslands previously were filled with wildflowers.
- Concern with access to the park. Many hillside park users trespass on privately owned stairs at south end of hillside park. The adjacent volunteer trail is unsafe.
- Signage needed with use restrictions.
- How much money is left in Measure R.
- What are the long term costs. Concerned about cost controls of any plan.
- If we remove any vegetation what do we replace it with.
- Consider the desirability of an easement on the parcel located to the south (Golden Gate Hill Development Co.) for future access along the fire trail from Pierce Street to the hilltop.
- Wants to protect the habitat for birds and nesting.
- Fire, erosion and wind are a concern for resident of Bayside Commons.

- Would like more information available on history of hill and early use of hill both for visitors and local elementary teachers.
- People also trespass and walk down private townhouse steps from Taft to Jackson. Need to develop safe access.
- Like to see the wildlife: deer, wild turkey. Amazed by the native trout and diversity of the two creeks. Would like to see a census done of the creeks to better understand the diversity.
- Concerned that during 2008 fire there was no clear information on what to do during the fire. There is a bottleneck on Taft with cars parked on both sides of street. Concerned about fire-truck being able to reach top of the hill.
- Another neighbor has observed wildlife on the hill including: blue monarchs, black scorpions, regular monarch butterflies using it as a way station.
- Encourage city to take out the eucalyptus especially those that are dead or hazardous trees. Concerned about fire hazard. Also concerned about being able to get the funding to implement the plan.
- Another neighbor encouraging city to remove eucalyptus especially on perimeter where they overhang the homes.
- West side of Taft Street sidewalk is buried in debris and trees are lifting the sidewalk. Would like to be able to use the sidewalk.
- Another neighbor also mentioned observing additional wildlife such as common raccoons, skunks and coyote scat.

Commissioner Comments

Tony Wolcott, City Urban Forester clarified that the annual vegetation management has been \$10,000 in the past years and focused on mowing the grasslands and reducing ladder fuels. In the past there has been occasional additional funds to support the broom removal along Jackson Street.

John Bailes

- Willow area is a special place. Consider additional benches to replace sofa.
- Encourage biodiversity and maintain what is in the park; what can we do to improve and increase what is there.
- Supports removal of eucalyptus hazardous trees for safety reasons to protect people and homes.

Eddie So

- Thanks to Friends of Five Creeks for comments and written information. Also wants to make sure that today's solutions are not tomorrow's problems.
- Would like to see action not just plans
- Fire hazard and safety major issue.
- Wants to see an evaluation of both advantages and disadvantages of the eucalyptus on Albany Hill; what would be there if not the eucalyptus.
- Would also like a similar evaluation of the grasslands in Creekside Park. What happens if they are not managed.
- Access and safety on the steep sides.

Arlene Pearson

- Fire control is a concern, but needs to be balanced with the benefits of the eucalyptus.
- Accessibility is also a concern throughout the park – the management of vegetation along the trails need to be wide enough to feel safe and encourage visitors to come to the park. The more people in the park the better – the more eyes the less vandalism and undesirable behavior.
- Education, signage and friends group are important. Community members and school kids should be incorporated in the program to build support.

John Kindle

- Albany has a great history of solving problems as a community.
- Albany hill is a local landmark, gathering point and spiritual place that represents Albany. The value of nature surrounded by our community needs to be highlighted.
- Wants to not forget the big picture.
- Understand management solutions costs and benefits.

Nick Pilch

- Access is important
- Ok to remove all the eucalyptus – non-native and fire hazard
- Also ok to remove all the non-native blackberries along the creek.
- Toyon are a great species.
- Acquisition of the adjacent parkland is something for the Commissioner's to address.
- Applauded all the work by the volunteers – pulling out blackberries and planting willows.

Heather Cunningham

- Supports the theme heard during the evening by many Commissioners and members of the public regarding their enjoyment of and connection to the hill.
- More accessible
- Safety and security and issue, especially fire management.
- Encourage wildlife and incorporate enhancements for them.
- Support educational opportunities to raise awareness, signage etc.
- Costs are a concern

Gary Class

- How to balance conservation and recreation is a key issue
- Plan needs to identify not only cost but also projects and ways these might be implemented.