

Parks and Recreation Commission October 13, 2011 - Meeting Notes

Attending:

Commissioner John Bailes
Commissioner Heather Cunningham
Commissioner John Kindle
Commissioner Alene Pearson
Commissioner Nick Pilch
Commissioner Eddie So

Staff: Penelope Leach

Consultant Cheryl Miller

The first draft of the vegetation management section of the Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan Update was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission for review and comment. Cheryl Miller provided an overview of the six sections of the draft plan (see powerpoint show for further information):

1. *Introduction and Planning Process* describes the project and planning process.
2. *Existing Conditions* documents the changes since the 1991 master plan.
3. *Plan Goals and Objectives* adds seven new considerations to the 1991 goals and recommendations.
4. *Management Strategies and Actions* identifies the recommended management actions grouped by the nine vegetation types present on site. This section also describes seven techniques that could be used.
5. *Monitoring Program* reviews the California Natural Diversity Database for special status plants or animals that may require protection, and reviews information about the use of the site by Monarch butterflies.
6. *Detailed Implementation Plan, Schedule and Costs* identify a variety of management options to reach the plan goals and objectives.

The management options were divided by vegetation management unit and prioritized into high, moderate and low priority. To facilitate discussion a series of 7 questions were reviewed that focused on the vision for each vegetation management unit. Each Commissioner was provided with a "score card" and relative costs of the various options. After discussion of the options, Commissioners made the following comments:

Commissioner Pilch: In favor of the options with long term management that slowly removes eucalyptus as they trees age leaving existing understory vegetation type (grassland, toyon, oak, north coastal scrub) for both the hilltop and new parklands between Taft and Jackson Streets. Supports discouraging human use of the steep slopes on the new parkland between Taft and Jackson and maintaining this area as an open space preserve for wildlife. In favor of long-term management to enhance meadow and riparian area, with invasive plants removed. Would like to contain invasive species and reduce the species to below the 2011 levels. Overall, Albany Hill and Creekside Park are the biggest natural open space in the City and he would like to enhance the area and maintain healthy ecosystems.

Commissioner Kindle: Supports similar options as Commissioner Pilch and expressed concern over the existing Eucalyptus. Also wants to reduce the invasive non-native species and recommends no new trails on the steep parklands between Jackson and Taft Street.

Comments from Friends of Five Creeks: Written comments were submitted to the commission. The Commissioners asked Ms. Miller about the review comments. She responded that all of the additions or changes related to vegetation management could be incorporated into the draft plan. Trail and access related comments will be addressed in the update being prepared by Staff to be discussed at the November Commission meeting.

“Score Cards”: Following the meeting the “score cards” used by the Commissioners were tallied with the following options being supported:

1. Vision for hilltop eucalyptus forest and understory (West of Taft St.)
(Units EGHT, ESHT, ETHT)

Majority - 5 of 6 supported

Long-term management to slowly remove eucalyptus leaving existing understory vegetation type (grassland, toyon, oak, north coastal scrub).

Result = Slow conversion from eucalyptus as trees age and are removed when needed, incorporating actions to reduce risk of fire and protection of native species. Remove eucalyptus seedlings, resprouts and young trees – do not allow forest to expand.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Long-term management to retain Eucalyptus overstory + mixed understory.

Result = Manage for existing eucalyptus forest and understory mix, incorporating actions to reduce risk of fire and protect native species. Manage at current tree density for fire safety and mixed understory.

2. Vision for vegetation in new parklands between Taft and Jackson
(Units: EGJT, EOJT, GOW)

Majority - 5 of 6 supported

Long-term management to maintain vegetation diversity. Eucalyptus Oak Woodland area (EOJT) and Grassland Oak Woodland area (GOW) manage to slowly remove eucalyptus allowing existing understory vegetation to dominate. Eucalyptus Grassland area (EGJT) manage to retain Eucalyptus overstory + grassland understory.

Result = Maintain existing species mix in center area (EGJT). Protect oak woodland on north and grass oak woodland on south from being shaded out by eucalyptus; safer vegetation types from fire protection perspective; more diverse habitat for wildlife.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Long-term management to slowly remove eucalyptus leaving existing understory vegetation type (grassland, toyon, north coastal scrub).

Result = Slow conversion from eucalyptus as scaled risk assessment indicates tree removal, incorporating actions to reduce risk of fire and protection of native species.

Remove eucalyptus seedlings, resprouts and young trees – do not allow forest to expand boundaries.

3. Vision for uses in new parklands between Taft and Jackson
(Units: EGJT, EOJT, GOW)

Majority - 5 of 6 supported

Discourage human use. Maintain as open space preserve for wildlife.

Result = Reduce vegetation management needed for ignition prevention – continue to monitor for health and invasive non-native species.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Accommodate human use (e.g. provide trail and steps to connect Jackson Street to Taft Street).

Result = Need to manage for ignition potential along trail or other access points in addition to monitoring for health and invasive non-native species.

4. Vision for oak woodlands
(Unit: OW)

Majority - 4 of 6 supported

Long-term vegetation management for protection and enhancement.

Result = Healthy oak woodland with diverse understory providing rich habitat for wildlife. See also management of non-native invasive species for understory health.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Minimal high-risk vegetation management (fire and physical hazards).

Result = Address fire hazards and storm damage. Young oak thicket may result in poorly shaped trees. Non-native invasive groundcover or shrubs may continue to take over large areas of understory reducing habitat value.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Either of the two options listed above

5. Vision for “big meadow” grasslands in Creekside Park
(Unit: G)

Majority - 5 of 6 supported

Long term management to enhance meadow.

Result = Grasses will be retained; shrubs and trees maintained at 2011 boundaries.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Minimal high-risk vegetation management (fire and physical hazards).

Result = Over long term shrubs and trees may encroach and make meadow smaller.

6. Vision for management of riparian areas
(Unit: R)

Majority - 5 of 6 supported

Long-term vegetation management for protection and enhancement.

Result = Healthy riparian area with diverse understory providing rich habitat for wildlife. See also management of non-native invasive species.

Minority – 1 of 6 supported

Minimal high-risk vegetation management (fire and physical hazards).

Result = Address fire hazards, flooding, safety and security concerns. Non-native invasive shrubs will continue to take over large areas reducing habitat value.

7. Vision for management of invasive non-native species

(All Units)

No Majority - 3 of 6 supported

Long-term management for fire hazards, to prevent pioneering species and contain invasive species at 2011 levels.

Result = Hold invasive non-native species at current population and geographic spread. Requires annual, or more frequent, monitoring for early detection and commitment of rapid response for removal of invasive species with establishment of IPM thresholds.

No Majority - 3 of 6 supported

Long-term management for fire hazards, to prevent pioneering species, and to contain invasive species and reduce species to below 2011 levels.

Result = Reduce invasive non-native species to below current levels. Requires annual, or more frequent, monitoring for early detection and commitment of rapid response for removal of invasive species with establishment of IPM thresholds. Reduce invasive, non-native high value habitat areas first with goal of eradication of individual species or in small areas as feasible.