



AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: February 28, 2012

TO: City Council

FROM: Doug Schmitz, City Manager

SUBJECT: Redwood Grove Committee

RECOMMENDATION: Forward the recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Commission to the Council's Redwood Grove Committee.

SUMMARY:

Estimated Fiscal Impact:

Amount: N/A

Budgeted: N/A

Public Hearing Notice: N/A

Previous Council Consideration: N/A

CEQA Status: None

Attachments:

1. February 8, 2012 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes – Excerpt
2. Report from Parks and Recreation Commission dated February 8, 2012

Douglas J. Schmitz, City Manager

Date

BACKGROUND:

On February 8, 2012, the Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) considered recommendations from its Redwood Grove Committee and approved the package of items 6-1 (Baron). A copy of the draft minutes of the PARC's action is enclosed.

The Council appointed Mayor Carpenter and Councilmember Casas as its Redwood Grove Committee. Council is requested to forward the PARC recommendation to its committee for review and comment, returning to Council upon completion of its review.

NOTE: The attachments referenced in the PARC report are available for review in the City Clerk's Office.

February 8, 2012 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes – Excerpt

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION
COMMISSION MEETING OF THE CITY OF LOS ALTOS, HELD ON WEDNESDAY,
FEBRUARY 8, 2012 AT 7:00 P.M. AT LOS ALTOS CITY HALL,
ONE NORTH SAN ANTONIO ROAD, LOS ALTOS, CALIFORNIA**

3 Redwood Grove Committee

Commissioner Bautista gave report.

Action:

ON MOTION BY COMMISSIONER BAUTISTA, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER GREGARUS, AND PASSED 6-1 (NAY BARON), the following recommendations to the City Council were approved along with adding the 1980 Redwood Grove Master Plan as an additional report attachment for submission to the City Council:

- a. Provide facilities consistent with the current use of Redwood Grove as outlined herein.
- b. Request the Los Altos Historical Commission to provide comprehensive documentation of the Halsey House and Caretaker Residence history.
- c. Engage an architecture firm with expertise in adaptive reuse and ecological and environmental design to provide a building assessment and comparative cost analysis for facilities at Redwood Grove
- d. Fund bridge and boardwalk improvements, pedestrian circulation pattern changes and other creek bank stabilization concerns in conjunction with the current creek bank erosion study being conducted by Acterra.

MEETING DATE: February 8, 2012

TO: City Council

FROM: The Los Altos Parks, Arts and Recreation Commission (PARC)

SUBJECT: Redwood Grove Assessment

RECOMMENDATION:

PARC recommends the City of Los Altos provide facilities that are consistent with the use of Redwood Grove as a nature preserve, as outlined herein.

PARC recommends requesting the Los Altos Historical Commission to provide comprehensive documentation of the Halsey House and Caretaker Residence histories.

PARC recommends engaging an architecture firm with expertise in adaptive reuse and ecological and environmental design to provide building assessment and comparative cost analysis for facilities at Redwood Grove

PARC recommends funding bridge and boardwalk improvements, pedestrian circulation pattern changes and other creek bank stabilization efforts in conjunction with the current creek bank erosion study being conducted by Acterra.

BACKGROUND:

On February 9, 2010, Los Altos City Council charged the Parks, Arts and Recreation Commission (PARC) with making a recommendation on a.) Facility Requirements, b.) Restrooms and c.) Bridge Improvements at Redwood Grove. This request follows the City's implementation of partnerships with Acterra for habitat restoration and with Youth Science Institute for educational programs at Redwood Grove: both were part of the Redwood Grove Task Force's initial recommendations on Redwood Grove from February 2008.

Consistent with the 1980 Redwood Grove Master Plan, the 5.7 acres of Redwood Grove remain a nature preserve providing individuals with a quiet and contemplative oasis in the midst of a suburban setting. Redwood Grove continues to be used for educational school tours focused on the natural environment as well as summer day camp for school age children: both are a collaboration between the Los Altos Recreation Department and Youth Science Institute. In summer 2010, Redwood Grove Camp served 580 campers. Additional Recreation Department programs feature archery classes, Green Beans preschool programs and children's birthday parties; all serving approximately 250 participants in FY 2010/2011.

Under the guidance of Acterra, Redwood Grove hosts regular community gatherings for the purpose of habitat restoration and land stewardship. From its inception in Fall 2009, the Acterra program has engaged over 1,000 volunteers of all ages to work collaboratively. Their efforts include the installation of approximately 1,300 native plants in and around the grove.

The 3,650 square foot Halsey House was deemed unsafe for use in 2009 and remains boarded up. The 900 square foot Caretaker Residence is used as a makeshift office for city staff and the employees of partnering entities. Neither building is available for public use.

On June 2010, City Council purchased a parcel of private property that allows for the connection of Shoup Park and Redwood Grove by means of a pedestrian pathway, a goal set forth in the 2009 vision statement.

DISCUSSION:

The preservation of Redwood Grove as a nature preserve is of utmost importance and highest priority.

A. Facility Requirements

In order to determine facility requirements, the PARC subcommittee has considered the following:

- 1980 Redwood Grove Master Plan
- Historic designation of the Halsey House
- Comparative regional ecological facilities
- Past and present use of Redwood Grove
- Input from user groups
- Community forum results from March 2011

PARC has identified the following preferred facility features:

1. Two meeting spaces, each to accommodate a group of 25-30 people
 - Meet requirements for the average size of school tours
 - Designed to meet Group E Occupancy requirements: Buildings used for children under 18 years of age.
2. Public restrooms
 - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/California Title 24 compliant
(See **Restrooms** below)
3. Boardwalks and pathways (See **Bridge** below)

4. ADA/Title 24 accessibility
 - One ADA parking space should be located in Redwood Grove; current driveway exceeds acceptable slope allowance for on-street parking.
 - As alternative, surface material on pathway from Shoup Park can be ADA compliant
5. Signage for fire safety and dog rules.
6. Outdoor gathering circle
 - Open air meeting spot
 - Rough-hewn design, integrated into landscape
 - Potentially pay homage to Ohlone customs
7. Administrative office with supplies storage
8. Teaching garden, can include:
 - Raised vegetable beds
 - Native landscape demonstration area
 - Early 20th century garden
9. Pathway connection to Los Altos Hills
10. Animal safe trash receptacles
11. Kitchen
 - To enhance program potential

Public discussions included the following options to meet facility requirements:

1. Restore and adaptively reuse the Halsey House and Caretaker Residence highlighting the early 20th century garden of Emma Halsey
2. Remove Redwood Grove's houses and replace them with either or both of the following:
 - A. A structure(s) that implements ecological design akin to regional buildings that highlight simple, sustainable design features. Examples include the Pearson Arastradero Preserve in Palo Alto and Hidden Villa Hostel in Los Altos Hills. (*Please see Attachment 1*).
 - B. Open-air structures and landscape features such as pole barn canopies and an outdoor gathering circle. Here, cover from weather elements provides an outdoor learning and gathering spot.

3. Share use/improvements with the Garden House in Shoup Park. The proximity to the Garden House by means of a pedestrian pathway allows the possibility of shared use for some activities.

In a community forum hosted by PARC on March 31, 2011, 65 attendees reaffirmed a commitment to keeping Redwood Grove a nature preserve. Attendees were satisfied with programs, summer day camp popularity being of particular note. Attendees voiced interest in preserving and adapting the houses, and potentially restoring the gardens around which the Redwood trees were planted almost 100 years ago. (*Please see Attachment 2 and 3*). Community members have also voiced concern to have all buildings be available for active use, not for the purpose of preservation only.

A staff report dated April 20, 2009, provided a preliminary analysis of renovation and site use options with associated costs (*Please see Attachment 4*). At that time, the Halsey House had a high score (95/100) on the City's Historic Resource Index (HRI). Recently, the HRI was restructured and the comparative Kalman scoring system was abandoned; however, the Halsey House maintains Local Landmark status (*Please see Attachment 5*). The Caretaker Residence is not recognized in the HRI. The staff report called for a more comprehensive building analysis following the HRI review, which is now complete.

As a next step, PARC recommends that City Council request the Los Altos Historical Commission to provide comprehensive documentation of the historical significance of the Halsey House and Caretaker Residence. The goal of this project is to compile disparate information and better inform further consideration of reuse.

PARC recommends engaging the services of an architecture firm with expertise in adaptive reuse and ecological and environmental design. The goal of a professional assessment is to determine the feasibility and cost of adaptive reuse of the Halsey House and/or Caretaker Residence weighed against the replacement of either or both structures with a new facility where the focus is on innovative ecological design.

B. Restroom Facilities

Currently, Redwood Grove offers one indoor restroom in the Caretaker Residence for use by City staff and the employees of professional partners, and two portable public restrooms on the east side of the bridge adjacent to neighboring residences. One portable unit is ADA accessible. The portable facilities require regularly scheduled pumping services.

Because of use by small groups and daylong programs, Redwood Grove should offer public ADA compliant restrooms. PARC recommends assessing the construction of a permanent public restroom taking into account minimizing the impact on neighboring residences. Public restrooms with exterior access should be included in all options for adaptive reuse of existing structures.

C. Bridge

The 8-ton capacity bridge at Redwood Grove appears adequate for current pedestrian traffic, and is not part of the access plan for emergency services. While inquiries by PARC have confirmed emergency access plans, PARC suggests that City Council verify that the Los Altos Police and the Santa Clara County Fire departments have a planned response that does not require use of the current bridge.

The bridge is part of the overall pathway circulation design that includes a second pedestrian bridge and boardwalks installed after the Master Plan was adopted in 1980. Sections of boardwalk and the pedestrian bridge at the northwest side of Redwood Grove have suffered significant deterioration as a result of Adobe Creek activity. In January 2011, Acterra was awarded a \$38,800 grant from the Santa Clara Valley Water District's Environmental Enhancement Planning Grant program for designing and engineering creek bank stabilization at the pedestrian bridge. Once the design plan is complete, additional funds may be required for its implementation in conjunction with a second grant from the Santa Clara Water District; this grant must be used within four years. PARC recommends that City Council prioritize funding of creek bank stabilization. PARC also suggests conducting inspections of both bridges by qualified engineers. Sections of the boardwalk and the Ridge Trail may require rerouting, and should receive immediate assessment and improvement.

FISCAL IMPACT:

To be determined

ALTERNATIVES:

Take no action.

Attachments:

1. 1980 Redwood Grove Master Plan
2. Redwood Grove Public Forum Summaries
3. Redwood Grove Staff Analysis, April 20, 2009
4. Historic Record Index, Primary Record
5. Comparative Regional Ecological Facilities
6. Los Altos History Museum Letter

