



90

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** May 14, 2008  
**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Parks, Arts & Recreation Commission  
**SUBJECT:** REDWOOD GROVE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

### RECOMMENDATION:

Motion recommending hiring a Landscape Architect to develop a Master Plan for Redwood Grove

### BACKGROUND:

In February 2007, PARC formed a subcommittee on Redwood Grove. Redwood Grove is home to educational programs for almost 6,000 children per year. Programs include Summer Day Camps, Regional School Programs (Ohlone Indians, Gold Rush, & environmental education), Birthday Parties, and other similar classes.

On February 26, 2008, City Council unanimously approved the PARC Mission Statement for Redwood Grove and assigned a liaison.

### DISCUSSION:

A significant community asset, Redwood Grove offers a rare natural respite and an incredible arena for environmental appreciation and education. As a center celebrating outdoor life, Redwood Grove is the Los Altos site for nature-based educational programs and day camps for school-age children; a gathering spot for family/community organizations; and a quiet setting for contemplative wanderings. Redwood Grove should serve as Los Altos' example of a green environment with eco-friendly buildings and appropriate land maintenance.

Redwood Grove is comprised of the following:

- 5.7 acres of natural landscape: Redwood and other California native trees and a seasonal creek.
- The Halsey House or Nature Center (approx 3,400 sq ft): A Spanish Revival building rated "landmark eligible," but in very poor condition.
- The Caretaker House (approx 900 sq ft): A 1925 residence rented by City to site caretaker, generating ~ \$6K/year in rental income.

- Pottery Studio: A small outlying structure rented by City to user, generating ~ \$10K/year in rental income.

In accordance with a Master Plan, dated 1980, PARC recommends maintaining and enhancing the current use of Redwood Grove in order to preserve its natural resources; offer only those facilities that encourage complimentary use; and, by design, regulate circulatory patterns to lesson impact while utilizing the entire site.

After several meetings and assessments, the PARC Redwood Grove Subcommittee recommends a phased approach to Redwood Grove improvements. Short-term efforts are already underway to prepare Redwood Grove to meet park status requirements and allow summer camps to move forward uninterrupted. Currently, Redwood Grove cannot be defined as a Nature Preserve due to prior land clearing and previous installation of irrigation systems. Redwood Grove is therefore best described as park land, and as such is not up to State standards for providing basic safety, sanitary, and access requirements for use by the general public.

Once general requirements are fulfilled, the PARC Subcommittee recommends securing a Landscape Architect to devise a Master Plan that delineates goals for further improvements and to define a process that includes public input. Goals for improvement follow:

The natural forest and seasonal stream are preserved.

- Preservation requires the elimination of the invasive plants and creation of an appropriate understory.
- Trees should be assessed for health and maintenance requirements with possibility of infill planting.
- Bridges and pathways are assessed for erosion issues.

The natural beauty of Redwood Grove's forest, seasonal stream and small open glades are complimented with minimal structures. All structures should meet latest green building standards, consistent with current City Building Code.

- The current Caretaker's House- renovated, removed or replaced, based on professional assessment- becomes the site of a Welcome Center with sanitary facilities, a classroom and introductory interpretation signage. The Welcome Center houses the Fava Indian Artifact collection.
- The existing historic Halsey House- renovated, removed, or replaced, based on professional assessment- serves as a meeting and education center. Facilities such as restrooms and a kitchen are upgraded/installed to meet the needs of day campers and small group users. The Nature Center is a potential revenue source.
- A natural amphitheatre, created in harmony with the landscape, is added to the site. This grass covered berm or wood/grass seating area includes a fire ring for outdoor group

gatherings. The amphitheater is one of the site's "outdoor classrooms," and a potential revenue source for meeting rentals.

- The Pottery Studio does not comply with the current vision and should likely be vacated or adapted to a use that meets site goals.
- Incorporate improvements at the Garden House if a connection to Shoup Park is obtained, to serve as a meeting and education center.

Access and circulatory patterns are improved.

- Weigh benefits of enhancing main entrance from University Avenue with more prominent entrance, ADA compliance, better signing, improved plantings, and furniture placement.
- To ease traffic from one entrance and to connect Redwood Grove to complimentary facilities, access to Redwood Grove should be expanded to include one or both of the additional points of entry:
  - Paved access from Manresa Road for foot or car traffic requires approval by Santa Clara County of their non-improved land. The Jesuit Center has a level parcel across the street from this access point that may be used for car parking or turnaround with consent.
  - A footpath from Shoup Park invites expanded user opportunities and shared parking. Access from Shoup Park requires either purchase or easement of an approximate 10'X 40' section of private real estate; owner is amenable.
- The timber bridge is upgraded to comply with emergency vehicle access unless a secondary access point is compliant.
- Internal pathways are repaired and upgraded where necessary to meet ADA Guidelines. Interpretative signing is enhanced.

Policy and funding issues are resolved.

- The City of Los Altos should establish a policy for the presence of caretakers on city-owned property and consider Redwood Grove under such policy.
- A funding plan should be established to include local foundations and entities focused on "green" efforts.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Council may:

1. Choose to support the Commission's recommendation.
2. Choose not to support recommendation

City Council

Page 4

Parks, Arts & Recreation Commission

JW/bat