



AGENDA REPORT

DATE: May 12, 2009
TO: City Council
FROM: Parks, Arts & Recreation Commission
**SUBJECT: REDWOOD GROVE MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT
IMPLEMENTATION**

RECOMMENDATION

- Motion approving the Redwood Grove Master Plan Amendment
- Motion supporting the acquisition of land adjacent to Shoup Park, and the suspension of capital improvement projects for Patriot Corner until resolved.
- Motion accepting the Police Department recommendation on On-Site Caretaker
- Motion approving public/private partnerships with Acterra and Youth Science Institute as follow:
 - Acterra to provide habitat restoration and land stewardship services
 - Youth Science Institute to provide year-round, school-age programs
- Motion approving facility improvements as follow:
 - Repairs to the Staff House for interim use to meet California Building Code Title 24 Educational Group E occupancy requirements.
 - Hiring an architect to assess site building needs and design

BACKGROUND

The Redwood Grove Task Force (RGTF) was formed in January 2008 as a collaborative effort between the Los Altos Parks, Arts and Recreation Commission, Los Altos City Council and City staff to interpret the Redwood Grove Master Plan and develop recommendations for preserving and improving Redwood Grove.

The six acres of Redwood Grove were originally established as a residence of the Halsey Family in 1927 with a 3,400 sq ft house. In 1942, the property was sold to the Bessey Family when six additional small buildings were added to the property as rental units; the last of these buildings, Cottage #9, was razed in 2009. The Staff House was likely built in the 1940s/50s. The City of Los Altos purchased the 5.6 acres in 1974 as an open space preserve and adopted the Redwood Grove Master Plan in 1980.

Since 1980, Redwood Grove has been used in accordance with the Master Plan (Attachment #1), limited to activities related to natural history and education, and “quiet times” for enjoying the

surroundings and solitude. Redwood Grove has served over 6,000 children annually through school-year programs and summer day camps.

For thirty years, the City of Los Altos had not provided the level of maintenance required to ensure the well-being of Redwood Grove's ecosystem and the integrity of its buildings. The Redwood trees are threatened, invasive plants dominate the landscape and riparian erosion is uncontrolled. Both the Nature Center (Halsey House) and the Staff House have been deemed uninhabitable due to structural, operational and environmental hazards.

The RGTF emphasizes Redwood Grove's place in Los Altos as a center for nature-based education that extends beyond high-quality school-age programs, but includes volunteer and educational opportunities that bring residents of all ages together in life-long learning.

DISCUSSION

1. Master Plan Amendment

The objectives of the 1980 Redwood Grove Master Plan are as follows:

- Preserve the area's irreplaceable natural resources for future use and enjoyment
- Offer only those facilities that encourage uses appropriate to the resources
- By design, regulate the circulatory patterns of the visitor to lesson the impact on critical areas while utilizing the entire site.

The Master Plan identifies areas of concern that have remained largely unresolved or unimproved since 1980 including the removal of invasive plants and planting of a redwood grove under-story; addressing access issues for both cars and pedestrians; ADA accessibility and restroom shortcomings; security/caretaker issues; determining whether trail, bridge, walkway and signage improvements are necessary; and reviewing flood issues.

In the proposed amendment to the Master Plan, the RGTF more specifically calls out details for implementation (Attachment #2):

- The natural setting and seasonal stream are preserved while access and circulatory patterns are improved.
- Redwood Grove habitat restoration and volunteer land stewardship occur under the guidance of regional experts.
- Redwood Grove continues to be the site of nature-based education provided by regional experts.
- The natural beauty of Redwood Grove's forest, seasonal stream and small open glades are complimented with minimal structures not to exceed the footprint of existing buildings. Buildings are platinum LEED certified. (Attachment #3)

2. Connection to Adjacent Open Space

The RGTF emphasizes the importance of the acquisition of private property, or an easement for use, to connect Shoup Park and Redwood Grove; City Council is in negotiations with a property owner. A footpath and small bridge joins two premiere open spaces with extraordinary mutual benefits:

- Expands user opportunities with additional points of passage; alleviates single-entry pedestrian/vehicle traffic.
- Allows shared, off-street parking and safe drop-off zone
- A cost-effective option for facility improvement; a single, multi-use building can serve both parks.

The RGTF recommends that no capital improvement projects be considered for Patriot Corner or the Garden House until City Council has a definitive resolution on the connection to Shoup Park.

The RGTF recommends supporting an access point from Manresa Road with an unpaved, pedestrian footpath.

- Santa Clara Water District (property owner) has granted easement
- Allows for emergency vehicle access

The RGTF recommends enhancing the Fremont Road/Lennox Way access to allow for safe pedestrian passage.

3. On-site Caretaker

The RGTF concurs with the Los Altos Police Department Report (Attachment #4) that a caretaker is not necessary at Redwood Grove.

- Limited access to vehicles at off-hours and regular police patrol, with the possible addition of electronic surveillance, are effective means to secure the location.
- Maintaining a reasonable level of year-round programming at Redwood Grove and establishing an on-site administrative office further contribute to security.

4. Public/Private Partnerships

The RGTF recommends partnering with regional experts for habitat restoration and education purposes. Regional organizations offer a level of expertise and efficiency that is not achievable with city staff. After discussions with many organizations and agencies, the RGTF recommends the services of Acterra and Youth Science Institute (YSI) as follows:

Acterra

Acterra, a non-profit organization formed in 2000 through the merger of two highly-regarded environmental organizations: the Peninsula Conservation Center Foundation (founded 1970) and Bay Area Action (founded 1990), has as its mission to bring people together to create local solutions for a healthy planet. The Acterra Stewardship program provides opportunities for individuals and groups to learn about ecology and participate in restoration work. The program is currently restoring sites at Pearson-Arastradero Preserve (in a partnership with the City of Palo Alto), along the San Francisquito watershed, and at schools and parks on the peninsula. Acterra attributes include-

- Proven expertise in habitat restoration and land stewardship
- Only full-service organization of its type in the Bay Area
- Operate a native plant nursery with thousands of specimen
- Provide permanent solution for creating a sustainable habitat.
- Los Altos Public Works does not have the expertise or personnel to develop a plan and accomplish more than basic maintenance.

- Cost effective and educational in using community-based programming to achieve results
- Acterra staff present on-site for all workdays
- Assist with grant opportunities
- Supported by Los Altos Public Works and Parks and Recreation Department.
- Important source for community service hours for teens.
- Services reviewed annually for benchmark accomplishments

The Acterra proposal (Attachment #5a, 5b & 5c) outlines services over a three-year period with a one-time restoration/ education plans development cost. Compensation should be negotiated between the City and Acterra. The RGTC recommends Park in Lieu fees be used for habitat restoration.

Youth Science Institute

Youth Science Institute (YSI), an independent not-for-profit organization, is a leader in nature-based science education. YSI focuses on hands-on learning of life sciences, physical sciences and social sciences, including biology, chemistry, physics, geology and astronomy. Programs are conducted at its three Science and Nature Centers in Vasona, Sanborn and Alum Rock parks, in schools and at community events. Centers feature live mammals, birds, insects, amphibians and reptiles. YSI attributes include-

- Specific expertise in school-age curriculum
- Services include complete registration and administration of classes; City of Los Altos only provides site
- 53 years experience
- Serve 30,000 children each year
- Meet Los Altos criteria for a modular K-6th grade school tour curriculum.
- Preferred provider by Los Altos School District
- Assist with grant opportunities

YSI operates by means of a combination of class fees and donations. Los Altos is required to assess YSI a per-student fee to cover overhead for site use only; The RGTF recommends reducing the standard overhead recovery since YSI handles registration and administration of program. YSI may need to assess a start-up fee to adapt curriculum to the Redwood Grove site. Terms of agreement should be negotiated between the City and YSI. (Attachments #6a, 6b, 6c & 6d)

5. Facility Improvements

Planning and Design

The RGTF recommends engaging an architect to address Redwood Grove facility needs. The architecture firm should have expertise in the following areas:

- Energy and resource efficient design
- Progressive sustainable building techniques
- Park buildings and built/natural environments
- LEED Platinum certification process

The following minimum features are required for an educational facility:

- Two 450 sq ft rooms to meet California Building Code Group E Educational use
- Administrative office

- Storage closets for administrative supplies
- ADA compliant public restroom facilities
- Small entry/exhibit space to house Fava Indian artifacts

Additional recommended features:

- Small demonstration kitchen for on-site garden food preparation
- Greenhouse for native plants
- Teaching garden
- Ohlone Village demonstration area

The RGTF recommends adding an outdoor gathering circle with a campfire element to Redwood Grove. The gathering circle is built of natural materials and harmonizes with the environment. Many Los Altos organizations seek a campfire opportunity.

The RGTF recommends completing the following improvements as called out in the 1980 Master Plan:

- ADA parking should be established.
- Internal pathways should be repaired and upgraded to meet ADA guidelines and aid in habitat restoration and maintenance efforts.
- Interpretative and directional signage should be enhanced.

Staff House Repairs

Due to the long-term process of architectural planning and design, and the desire to have programming resume at Redwood Grove as soon as possible, the RGTF recommends repairing the Staff House to serve as an interim administrative office for outside organizations and city staff, and an assembly location for educational use. The Staff House has served as an administrative office for Recreation Department summer camp programs.

- The removal of an interior wall allows for the assembly of 25 people
- Repairs must meet California Building Code Group E Educational Occupancy requirements.

Halsey House Status

According to a staff report dated April 20, 2009, structural, operational and environmental hazards render the Halsey House uninhabitable (Attachment #7). Occupancy is prohibited.

The Halsey House as is-

- A 3,400 sq ft Spanish Revival residence built in 1928
- Designated a “local landmark” by City of Los Altos in 1981
- Used as an education center since 1980
- The Kalman Score on the Historic Resource Inventory was recently reduced to 73/100 from 95/100 (Attachment #8).
- Served as a residence for only 20 years
- Has been physically altered over time.
- Economics and alterations to achieve California Building Code Group E Educational Occupancy requirements are imprudent.

The Historic Resource Inventory considers exterior detail only. Staff estimates the costs associated with maintaining the exterior details while creating a compliant space to be \$1.5 to \$2 million dollars. Staff estimates cost of removal to be \$40K.

Attachments:

1. 1980 Redwood Grove Vision Plan
2. 2009 Vision Plan Amendment from PARC
3. Arastradero Preserve Building Photos
4. Caretaker Report- Younis/Tucker
5.
 - a. Acterra Proposal
 - b. Timeline
 - c. Acterra Memo- Tucker
6.
 - a. Youth Science Institute Memo- Ford
 - b. Youth Science Institute Fact Sheet
 - c. Youth Science Institute Summary of Programs
 - d. Youth Science Institute Flier
7. Nature Center Condition Report- Brees
8. Halsey House DPR Report 2009
9.
 - a. June 17, 2008 City Council Meeting Agenda
 - b. Redwood Grove Landscape Architect Memo-PARC