

County of Santa Clara Parks and Recreation Department



PRK03 060512

Held
Meeting Date: June 5, 2012
Processor Name: Dusty Christopherson
Item Number: 15

Prepared by: Tim Heffington
Senior Real Estate Agent

Reviewed by: Julie Mark
Deputy Director

DATE: June 5, 2012

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robb Courtney", with a blue circular stamp to the right.

Robb Courtney
Director

SUBJECT: Report Back and Policy Recommendations Relating to County of Santa Clara
Draft Parkland Acquisition Plan: 2011 Update and 2012 Update.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Consider recommendations relating to Parkland Acquisition Plan: 2011 Update and 2012 Update.

Possible action:

- a. Under advisement from March 29, 2011 (Item No. 15): Accept report relating to Parkland Acquisition Plan: 2011 Update and 2012 Update.
- b. Accept staff recommendations, as modified by HLUET Committee on April 12, 2012, as set forth on Page 11.
- c. Direct staff to initiate General Plan Amendment process, followed by adoption of revised Acquisition Plan, 2012 Update.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct fiscal implications resulting from accepting the report. Future implementation of the recommendations will result in expenditure of Park Charter acquisition funds. Implementing a General Plan Amendment process requires CEQA analysis and a public process that could result in costs of at least \$47,500.

CONTRACT HISTORY

Not applicable.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

At the March 29, 2011 Board meeting, the Board accepted staff policy recommendations related to the Parkland Acquisition Plan: 2011 Update, as amended, based on input from Supervisors at the September 28, 2010 Board of Supervisors' Study Session, affirming the following:

1. The County's role in providing park services to park-deficient urban and suburban areas in the county; and,
2. The County's role in land acquisition, at both the regional level and in partnership with other park and recreation service providers in the county's urban core.

At that time, the Board of Supervisors directed staff, at the request of Supervisor Yeager, to prepare a report on the development of a formalized acquisition program to address urban and suburban park needs, consistent with the County's historical role, while still maintaining the County's commitment to the acquisition of regional parklands, and to review this report at the Housing, Land Use, Environment and Transportation Committee (HLUET) prior to consideration by the Board of Supervisors. Department staff undertook the following activities in order to address the Board's direction:

In order to determine and describe the County's historic role in acquiring and providing urban parks, the Department conducted an analysis of acquisitions for the last 22 years, dating from Fiscal Year 1990. (Property documentation is most comprehensive and reliable from 1990 forward).

1. At the request of the Board, staff conducted an outreach program inviting the general public, public agencies, cities, and school districts to provide additional input relative to the County's future role in urban parkland acquisition services.
2. Staff considered current trends and recent input received by the Department related to park and recreational facility needs within the urban areas of the county.
3. Based on Board input and discussion regarding urban areas of the county that may be underserved in terms of access to parks, staff conducted an analysis of park accessibility within the unincorporated urban islands greater than 150 acres and conducted a prioritization exercise to determine which areas reflect the greatest need as measured by residential access to park-like facilities.
4. Staff developed options and strategies that are intended to elevate the County's leadership role with respect to trails within the urban core of the county.

Staff reported these findings to the HLUET Committee on April 12, 2012, and HLUET directed staff to modify the report and recommendations to address the following topics and direction from HLUET:

a. Regional Parks:

Retain "regional parks" as a focus for urban parkland acquisition. Staff will continue to evaluate potential acquisitions for features of countywide significance that will contribute to the County's regional system of parks and trails.

b. City of San Jose 1/3 Mile Park Access Standard:

Modify the countywide analysis used to measure unincorporated island resident access to parklike features (parks, trails, school sites) to reflect the benchmark utilized by the annexing city. While retaining the 1/4 mile countywide residential park proximity benchmark within the report, attached, to provide a consistent countywide measure to compare access, staff also conducted a focused urban island park proximity analysis for the priority unincorporated islands which reflect the 1/3 mile City of San Jose Greenprint standard. The results of this new analysis are reflected on page 10.

General Plan Update

An explanation of the process and general sequence of activity that would be required to

amend the General Plan for the purpose of including a new policy recommendation is described on page 10.

CHILD IMPACT

The recommended action will have no immediate impact, although implementation of the recommendations will have a future positive impact on the Healthy Lifestyle indicator by providing increased access to parks and trails.

SENIOR IMPACT

The recommended action will have no immediate impact, although implementation of the recommendations will have a future positive impact on seniors by providing increased access to parks and trails.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The recommended actions would be consistent with the Board's Sustainability Policies to promote a vibrant economy, foster a healthy environment, protect resources and/or public health, safety and recreation, and to advance social equity and safety subject to a thoughtful, balanced approach among shared and competing interests.

BACKGROUND

In March, 2011, the Board accepted the results of the September 2010 Board of Supervisors Study Session which included an explanation of the historic roles of various partner agencies (federal, state, special district, non-profit, and others) in providing a spectrum of urban park, open space, and regional parks throughout the county.

The County's role, within that spectrum, has been primarily focused on acquisition of regional parks and trails, often through partnership with other entities that provide ongoing operations and maintenance of these facilities. The Department's contribution to this partnership effort has been made possible through voter support of the Park Charter.

The Park Charter, first enacted in 1972, and renewed six times, allocates a percentage of the Department's budget to land acquisition. Most recently renewed in 2006, the current Charter sets aside 15% of annual allocations for real property acquisition. Since the 1993 Board adoption of the Parkland Acquisition Policy, the Department has employed the Policy's criteria to evaluate possible acquisitions prior to recommending Board approval of property acquisitions.

Acquisition Criteria

These former Board-adopted criteria focused on acquiring proposed regional parks and trails, based on one or many of the following:

- *Expansion of an Existing County Park;*
- *Trail Connectivity;*
- *Establishing a new General Plan-identified Park;*
- *Consistency with an Adopted Plan;*
- *Funding Availability; and*
- *Location within the Unincorporated county.*

As a result of a public input process, in March 2011, the Board accepted the report in which these criteria were retained while other Board policy document criteria (e.g. Strategic Plan, Countywide Trails Master Plan) were incorporated into one document. These previously adopted criteria include: *Countywide Significance, Partnership Criteria, Sustainability Criteria, and Property Characteristics*. Secondary "priority criteria" (*Funding Leverage, Threat of Development, Existing Park/Trail Expansion, General Plan Consistency, and Costs*) were also identified and would be applied if multiple properties met the previously adopted Board criteria in order to prioritize expenditure of available acquisition funds.

County's Urban Acquisition History

To undertake an analysis, it was necessary to first establish the boundary between urban and rural areas of the county. Staff used the existing definition of urban service areas (USA) within the county because it is a delineation of "urban" that is accepted by the County and the 15 cities. This accepted designation separates rural projects from urban/suburban projects. In examining the County's acquisition history since 1990, it was determined that:

- Fourteen of the County's 62 acquisition projects are located within the USA.
- Since 1990, over \$113 million has been spent on parkland acquisitions.

- \$36.4 million or 32% of that amount was dedicated to acquisition of property within the Urban Service Area that also had regional significance.

The Department also conducted an analysis of the portion of public parkland, within the USA, that is owned or operated by the County, or in which the County participated in the purchase. The County owns and/or has participated in providing 23% of the 11,333 acres of public parkland within the urban service area of Santa Clara County.

A recent urban acquisition is the Three Creeks Trail project. In this project, the County and the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority provided funding to the lead agency, the City of San Jose, for purchase of a Union Pacific Railroad corridor that will be developed into a trail. This trail will ultimately connect three different creekside trails: the Los Gatos Creek Trail, the Guadalupe River Parkway, and the Coyote Creek Trail. This type of urban partnership, within city boundaries and where multiple partners bring a funding share to a project, is representative of many funding partnerships that have occurred within the USA.

Community Outreach

Staff conducted a new community outreach process focused on urban/suburban park needs and sent emails to approximately 20,000 recipients, placed three ads in the San Jose Mercury News, and 3 separate postings within local neighborhood newspapers and web page updates (which were also posted by community organizations and non-profit partners). Local libraries and community centers were asked to post flyers, and direct outreach was conducted with the cities' parks departments. As a result, there were 437 people who participated in some part of the public input process. Fifty-five people attended four public meetings focused on urban parkland acquisition.

The Department also hosted two focus group discussions with agency staff, and provided an opportunity for input at a countywide Parks Directors forum. Additional input was solicited via on-line surveys. School districts were provided a focused on-line survey, and miscellaneous correspondence was received. The results of the public input process are described in the attached summaries. Participants voiced the following themes:

- **Connectivity:** This theme (connections through trails, linear parks, riparian corridors, or linking parks and open space) was supported by all as a critical and appropriate role for County Parks.
- **Trails:** Organized trail groups, individuals, and partner agency staff voiced support for trails in general and voiced support for specific urban trail projects (e.g. Five Wounds,

Three Creeks, Bay Trail). The Countywide Trails Master Plan and City trail plans were cited as guiding documents for achieving trail connectivity.

- **Partnerships:** All participants supported continuation of the County practice of entering into partnerships to provide a spectrum of services that result in connecting parks and open space, developing connective trails, and acquiring projects that serve a countywide interest in providing parks and trails.
- **Recreational Use of Schools:** Most schools indicated that they allow public access for recreational purposes after school hours. Many districts were interested in opportunities to partner with the County or other agencies to enhance that access.
- **Guidelines/Criteria:** Individuals supported use of guidelines, or criteria, as a mechanism for determining the sites that should/could be acquired for future parks. Utilization of these criteria provides long-term flexibility for determining when opportunity-based acquisitions might be appropriate to expand, connect, or establish new County parks and trails.
- **Unincorporated Urban islands:** There was the greatest support for acquisition of parks and connective trails in unincorporated urban areas to link existing parks and recreational facilities and to facilitate public access to recreational resources.

There were also concerns raised through the community outreach process, and these have been grouped into two broad categories below.

Underserved Populations and County islands

There was no consensus regarding the County's role in provision of neighborhood parks to underserved populations. Some agencies stated that their organizations support the County system of parks by operating and maintaining regional facilities within city boundaries; other agencies stated that the neighborhood parks they currently maintain benefit residents of unincorporated islands. Some community members expressed that, in order for unincorporated islands to obtain urban neighborhood parks, these communities should initiate annexation procedures with local cities, while a small number of community members expressed that the County should provide neighborhood parks to these unincorporated areas.

Financial Sustainability

City staff, community members, and representatives of organizations all expressed concern regarding long-term operations and maintenance costs for developed parks, both within cities and the county. Cities currently have challenges in trying to maintain geographically dispersed neighborhood parks, especially small parks of less than five acres. Both city staff and members of the public discussed the concept of economy of scale in maintaining both continuous linear parks/trails and a smaller number of large acreage parks rather than

acquiring small acreage parks. The general sense was that long-term sustainability of parks and trails should be considered prior to purchase and development of new parklands. Maintaining fiscal sustainability of the County parks system is particularly important moving forward given that the projected operating costs of the new Martial Cottle Park are anticipated to exceed the capacity of ongoing operating revenues.

Trends and Opportunities Analysis

The following describes the other components of the public outreach and trends analysis:

School District Meeting

An outcome resulting from the school district survey is that parks staff met with representatives of the Alum Rock School District. The District expressed interest in the development of future partnerships to provide neighborhood and/or community park amenities. The District was supportive of considering development of currently owned district properties where park improvements could enhance public recreational usage. This particular strategy of partnering on capital improvements would not be property acquisition and is, thus, outside the scope of the Acquisition Plan, but may be considered if Park Charter Capital Development funds grow in the future. The Department will continue exploring opportunities for partnerships with school districts where full public park access could be provided.

2009 California Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) and Trails

The California Department of Parks and Recreation publishes this survey on statewide participation in outdoor recreational activities. According to this study of trends, walking, running, and bicycling are by far the top recreational activities. 74.2 % of Californians participate in walking for fitness or pleasure, 46.9% in day hiking on trails, and 39.8% in jogging and running for exercise, and 36.3% in bicycling on paved surfaces. There are substantial opportunities to help complete the trail network with the urban service area of the county. A planned network of approximately 170 miles lies within the urban service boundary and only approximately 44% of it is completed. (Segments of trails that utilize the existing road right-of-way were not counted as part of the 170 miles.)

Recognizing Additional Trends

Most cities report that there is tremendous public demand to provide increasing capacity for sports fields. The Department has received recent inquiries related to the potential lease or partnership for use of County parkland to house large sports facilities, such as, a soccer and softball field complex, that provide facilities for league play and tournaments. It may be

possible to work with cities to coordinate efforts to see how to best meet this common need.

Urban Area Analysis

While the 15 cities are providers of neighborhood parks within their respective jurisdictions, outside these jurisdictional boundaries, there exist islands of unincorporated land, some of which are not well served by adjacent parkland, schools, trails or open space. Under Board policy, these islands are intended to eventually be annexed by the adjacent city and the respective city would subsequently be responsible for providing neighborhood and community serving park services to these residents. In a February, 2011 report from the Local Agency Formation Commission of Santa Clara County (LAFCO), staff reported that the streamlined annexation program (available only to islands of less than 150 acres) will sunset on January 1, 2014. This program provides cost savings related to annexation of these smaller islands.

Within the county, LAFCO reports that there are approximately 87 unincorporated islands remaining and 15 of these islands are greater than 150 acres in size. Given that the streamlined program provides financial incentives to cities to focus on the small islands, it appears unlikely that these 15 islands, which do not benefit from similar financial incentives or streamlined annexation possibilities, will be annexed in the foreseeable future.

Staff conducted an analysis of these large islands to determine where the greatest need for parks exists. The purpose of the analysis was to look at the level of access residents of the islands have to parks, trails, or school sites (park-like facilities). A summary is provided and a more detailed explanation of the process is attached.

Analysis of the Unincorporated Islands of 150 Acres

In order to provide a comparative analysis of the 15 islands, a geographic information mapping system was utilized to determine the proximity of the residents from these islands to park facilities within 1/4 mile radius. After eliminating some islands due to existing park access or lack of population, islands with the greatest distance to facilities were identified as priority islands. It is important to note that this 1/4 mile radius is not a standard for determining park deficiencies; the 15 cities have their own unique standards for determining underserved or park-deficient areas.

Within each of the islands, staff considered its population, relative size (acreage), and the percent and size of the population outside the 1/4 mile radius. Two islands, Alum Rock and Burbank, stood out as priorities based on these criteria. A map of the two islands showing the access to nearby park facilities, is attached as Exhibit 5. The vital statistics for the two top priority areas, including the original analysis of 1/4 mile proximity and the HLUET-directed

1/3 mile proximity analysis comparisons are as follows:

Name	Size (acres)	Pop.	Pop. Lacking ¼ Mile Access	Residents Lacking ¼ Mile Access	<i>Pop. Lacking 1/3 Mile Access</i>	<i>Residents Lacking 1/3 Mile Access</i>
Alum Rock	1,421	16, 292	47.3%	7,706	29.3%	4,767
Burbank	391	4,432	69%	3,058	45.6%	1,931
City of SJ	115,098	945,942	32.80%	310,269	19.24%	181,999

In order to consider staff recommendations concerning parkland acquisition in the priority urban islands, it is necessary to consider Parks and Recreation Element consistency with the General Plan.

General Plan Consistency Analysis

The current Parks and Recreation Element of the General Plan identifies cities and other appropriate agencies as the provider of local neighborhood-serving parks and recreational facilities, and identifies the County as a provider of regional serving facilities. The Board-adopted Strategic Plan clarifies that cities and neighborhood/homeowner associations are appropriate providers of neighborhood, community, and citywide parks and recreational facilities. If the Board were to approve our recommendations to be the park provider in those limited circumstances pertaining to urban unincorporated islands of 150+ acres that possess a high percentage of park-deficient residents, staff would need to address consistency with the Parks and Recreation Element of the General Plan.

Staff's plan would be to develop a new policy within the Parks and Recreation Element of the General Plan that would allow for the establishment of neighborhood-serving parks within the context of specific parameters, such as, park level of service targets for unincorporated urban islands and pre-annexation agreements with the neighboring city for islands of 150+ acres. This new policy would allow for future planning with the annexing city and the provision of future park services for residents of large unincorporated islands.

Parks staff has consulted with County Planning staff regarding the issue of General Plan consistency and a General Plan Amendment process. Based on this consultation, it appears the process, which would require a minimum of six months to a maximum of twelve months, would entail the following steps:

- Board direction to initiate public process for General Plan Amendment
- County Planning Office analysis of General Plan (other chapters of GP) for consistency
- External outreach (Public process for involving stakeholders, cities, agencies)
- Refine and complete project description for CEQA
- Public notification
- Develop staff report for GPA
- Inform Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission of GPA process
- BOS Hearing to consider GPA

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Board's direction and review of the matters set forth in this report, the Department makes the following recommendations:

1. Enhance our Leadership and Support of Urban Trails

The Department should strengthen and expand its focus and role in completing the Countywide Trails Master Plan since walking, running and biking are, by far, the top recreational activities. Furthermore, trails provide multiple benefits to individuals and communities in the areas of promoting healthy lifestyles, providing alternative forms of transportation, reducing congestion and carbon footprint, and supporting livable communities.

There are substantial opportunities to help complete the regional and sub-regional trail network. The Countywide Trails Master Plan calls for 170 miles of trails within the urban service area, to date only 44% (75 miles) of these trails have been completed. The Department would seek to implement this recommendation by:

- a. Reallocating workloads to make an existing Planner position available to focus on trails planning. The dedicated trails planner can assist cities by providing technical expertise, and complete planning, acquisition and construction of trail alignments.
- b. Proactively working with cities to plan for acquisition of properties that would provide recreational amenities (e.g. picnic areas and playgrounds) adjacent to regional and sub-regional trailhead access.
- c. Seek trail partnership opportunities with transportation agencies that plan transportation projects within the County (e.g. Valley Transportation Authority, California

Dept. of Transportation).

- d. Seek appropriate grant opportunities to help construct regionally serving trails.

2. Enhance Coordination with Cities to Address Urban Parks Needs

The Department should formalize the urban partnership process by increasing our outreach to cities and other partners, to ensure that cities are aware of County partnership opportunities.

In order to increase County focus on urban trails and development of joint strategies with cities to acquire urban serving park facilities with a regional nexus, the County would implement the following actions:

- a. Hold an annual cities meeting with the 15 cities and other agency partners to identify partnership projects with an acquisition component.
- b. Conduct follow-up focus meetings with appropriate partners to further develop and/or recommend implementation of projects.
- c. Facilitate an annual meeting of the Park Directors Forum (city park directors and professionals) for the focused purpose of an Acquisition Plan update, identifying city priorities, and future potential for collaboration on acquisition projects with the County.

3. Address Needs of Alum Rock and Burbank Unincorporated Urban Islands

The Department recommends that cities continue to be the primary provider of neighborhood and community serving park facilities. However, it appears unlikely that many of the large urban islands will be annexed into adjacent cities in the foreseeable future. In some instances, the character of the geography and development patterns in these islands have resulted in limited access to parks and recreational facilities. In consideration of the fact that there is no other likely provider of park services to residents of these areas, and the Alum Rock and Burbank islands are of a relatively large area and population with limited access to park-like facilities, the Department recommends that it should take on the responsibility for assessing and where necessary providing park services to the Alum Rock and Burbank unincorporated islands. Implementation measures associated with this recommendation include:

- a. Conducting a detailed park needs assessment for these areas including determining the appropriate service level objective.

- b. Working with schools and other organizations to enhance access to recreational facilities that will meet the needs of residents in these areas.
- c. Where necessary, fund the acquisition, with partners when possible, of land and strive to find other agencies that will operate the neighborhood or community serving park facility. If no other agency is willing to take on operating responsibility for neighborhood or community serving park facilities, consider establishing a benefit assessment district to cover the cost of operation.
- d. Consider acquiring lands for "land banking" until a funding mechanism for future planning, development, operations and maintenance is determined.
- e. If the Department were to acquire stand-alone lands for park use, it should develop a pre-annexation agreement with the annexing city that would ensure future transfer of these parks to the city upon annexation. Any pre-annexation agreement would include the following elements:
- Proposed annexation schedule for the unincorporated island, including the annexation of parcels to be acquired for parkland.
 - County conveyance of acquired property to City at time of annexation.
 - Process for City-County approach to pre-planning, design, and development of future neighborhood park.
 - Operations and management agreement specifying assignment of management responsibilities at time of annexation.

4. Amending the Parkland Acquisition Plan: 2011 Update and 2012 Update

The Department would prepare a chapter entitled, "Urban Trails, Parks, and Open Space" that reflects the findings and recommendations as set forth above or as may be amended by the Board.

5. Amending the General Plan

To ensure internal consistency of the Parks and Recreation Element, the General Plan should be amended with a new policy statement focused on parkland acquisition services within the urban islands.

CONCLUSION

By implementing these strategies, the Department can build upon its history of partnership with urban recreation providers, provide new resources for trail planning and implementation, continue its focus on providing connectivity between multiple parks and recreation facilities, and enhance its outreach and responsiveness to the community.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

The County staff would not receive Board guidance relative to the County's future role in urban trail and parkland acquisition.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

Send Keyboard notification to Tim Heffington, Senior Real Estate Agent.

ATTACHMENTS

- Exhibit 1: PowerPoint Slides
- Exhibit 2: Acquisition History Table
- Exhibit 3: Letters of Interest
- Exhibit 4: Supplemental Comments (Received May 22, 2012)
- Exhibit 5: Key Maps