



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 22-564

Board Meeting Date: 7/26/2022

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: Revised Flood Park Landscape Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution accepting the Revised Flood Park Landscape Plan.

BACKGROUND:

Flood County Park ("Flood Park") is a 21-acre County-owned and operated park that is located in the City of Menlo Park. Founded in 1937, Flood Park has served the recreational needs of residents of southern San Mateo County for 85 years.

Historically, Flood Park was a destination for outdoor play and adventures, at one point even providing one of the only public swimming pools in the county and hosting regular baseball games and practices, including minor league baseball games. In the 1980's, Flood Park was renovated to provide the public with enhanced active recreational opportunities and to make the park more accessible for people of all abilities. Although Flood Park was a thriving public resource for much of its existence, in recent decades, park facilities have deteriorated. Today, Flood Park consists of a playground, sand volleyball courts, baseball and softball fields (unusable due to poor condition), picnic/reservation sites, tennis courts (unusable due to poor condition), and open grassy fields with mature trees. The park serves as a major recreation resource for many residents of Menlo Park, North Fair Oaks, and East Palo Alto.

In 2014, the San Mateo County Parks Department ("Department") assessed the condition of Flood Park's amenities and determined that a complete overhaul is warranted. This led to the creation of the Reimagine Flood Park Project ("Project"), a multi-year public engagement process that led to the development of the 2020 Landscape Plan (Attachment A) and Final Revised Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") which were adopted and certified by the Board of Supervisors in November 2020.

In 2021, the Department contracted with CMG Landscape Architects to prepare detailed design plans and obtain all required permits and approvals to construct the Project. Prior to preparing the schematic designs, and due to a call from the public to preserve the heart of the park's oak woodland, the Department held a virtual workshop and two pop-up events, while also opening an

online survey to collect further public feedback. Approximately 85 members of the public attended the workshop, and nearly 800 people responded to the survey. The findings of this engagement reaffirmed the Project's five overarching public priorities developed between 2015 and 2017: promoting healthy lifestyles, preserving existing trees, incorporating innovative technologies, creating community gathering spaces, and expanding types of uses. Using the information received from the workshop, pop-up events, and surveys, the Department prepared the Revised Landscape Plan (Attachment B).

DISCUSSION:

Analysis of the feedback received during the Project's robust, multi-year public engagement process determined that people use Flood Park to exercise, be in nature, and gather and play with family and friends. Participants in the public engagement process prioritized preservation of heritage trees and the heart of the park's oak woodland, as well as expansion of active recreation facilities and uses. Active recreation facilities most desired include the multi-use sports fields, the baseball/softball field, and the all-abilities playground. A majority of participants also expressed a desire to use the picnic and reservation areas to gather with family and friends.

Trees

When compared to the 2020 Landscape Plan, the Revised Landscape Plan reduces the number of trees to be removed as a result of the Project from 72 trees to 64 trees by relocating the small multi-use field outside of the oak woodland, re-routing the walking path, eliminating the promenade, and re-purposing areas that have already been disturbed by built features. More importantly, the Revised Landscape Plan shifts most of its impact from native species to non-native species. In total, 54 (85%) of the 64 trees to be removed are non-native species that provide limited ecological value. Five of the trees to be removed are native species under 12 inches in diameter and five of the trees to be removed are native species over 12 inches in diameter. Just as before, no heritage trees will be removed due to the Project.

In accordance with the Project's EIR, the Department will replace all trees removed on a 1:1 ratio; the Department is also evaluating ways to replant trees at a higher ratio without overcrowding the park. Further, the Department is preparing a plan to replace removed trees with trees that are more resilient to the changing climate conditions in San Mateo County and that provide greater habitat value for local wildlife. This plan is still being developed and will be finalized before the Project plans and specifications are presented to the Board for consideration later this year.

Sport Fields and Courts

The Revised Landscape Plan maintains the same sport fields and courts as the 2020 Landscape Plan, but relocates them to minimize their impact on native trees and to create a more natural flow in the park. The existing baseball field will be renovated and made compatible for both youth baseball and youth softball, and a multi-use sport field will be added to the outfield. In addition, a separate multi-use sport field will be located immediately south-east of the baseball/softball field.

The dimensions of the two multi-use sport fields are based on the feedback received during the public engagement process. The large field can support up to U18 soccer while the smaller field can support up to U12 soccer. Providing two fields at Flood Park is critical because the public has repeatedly expressed concerns about the lack of available fields in the area for both organized leagues and drop-in play for families and friends. This is of particular importance for residents of North Fair Oaks who have no other public fields in their community.

The tennis/pickleball courts and basketball court will be located where existing sand volleyball courts and a reservation area are located. The new sand volleyball courts will be located where an existing sand volleyball court is located. Lastly, the bicycle pump track will be added to an undeveloped area of the park. By utilizing spaces that currently accommodate a built facility, the Department can minimize the Project's impact on existing park resources.

Picnic/Reservation Sites

Eighty-three percent of survey respondents to the Department's 2022 survey indicated that they would use the picnic areas at Flood Park. This is consistent with the Department's observations, which are that one of the most popular features at Flood Park are the picnic and group reservation areas. To satisfy the ongoing demand for these spaces, the Department will maintain the existing quantity and capacity of picnic and reservation sites at the park.

Play Spaces

The playground and adventure play area are among the most desired features to be built in the park. The playground, which will be designed to support people of all ages and abilities, will be the first of its kind in the San Mateo County Parks system, with an adventure play area designed to provide park visitors with an opportunity to use their imagination to play. The Department is working with the Magical Bridge Foundation to ensure that Flood Park's play spaces will be fully-accessible to users of all ages and abilities.

Impacts

The Department recognizes that parks generate noise and parking demand, and these impacts were analyzed in the Project's EIR that this Board certified in 2020. To mitigate these impacts to a less than significant level, the Department has maintained a 100-foot buffer from the neighbors on Del Norte Avenue, and will implement all mitigation measures from the EIR including limiting practices and games on the fields to the hours of 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., prohibiting foghorns and other similar devices used by spectators at sporting events, and requiring a special event permit for sound amplification devices. Further, when scheduling events (sports games and practices, parties at reservation sites, events at the preserved adobe administration building), the Department will ensure that anticipated attendance at the approved events does not exceed the parking capacity of the park.

The Department's environmental consultant for the Project conducted a supplemental analysis of potential noise impacts related to the Revised Landscape Plan. The analysis, included as Exhibit B to the attached resolution, concludes that the Revised Landscape Plan would not result in any new significant or substantially more severe noise impacts. More generally, the Revised Landscape Plan would result in similar environmental impacts as the plan analyzed in the 2020 EIR; some impacts would be reduced through the adaptation of already developed areas and reductions in the number of native trees to be removed. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15162, no additional environmental review of the Revised Landscape Plan is required, because the revised plan would not result in a new significant impact or a substantial increase in the severity of a previously identified significant impact.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with accepting the Revised Landscape Plan.