



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 20-836

Board Meeting Date: 11/10/2020

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director

Subject: Flood County Park Landscape Plan and Final Revised Environmental Impact Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Conduct a public hearing regarding the Flood County Park Landscape Plan, Final Revised Environmental Impact Report, Errata, California Environmental Quality Act Findings of Facts and a Statement of Overriding Consideration, and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan:

- A) Open public hearing
- B) Close public hearing
- C) Adopt a resolution authorizing:
 - 1. The approval of the Flood County Park Landscape Plan; and
 - 2. The certification of the Flood County Park Landscape Plan's Final Revised Environmental Impact Report and Errata; and
 - 3. Adoption of California Environmental Quality Act Findings of Facts and a Statement of Overriding Consideration; and
 - 4. Adoption of the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan.

BACKGROUND:

Flood County Park ("Flood") is a 21-acre County-owned and operated park that is located in the City of Menlo Park. Flood consists of a playground, volleyball courts, baseball and softball fields, picnic/reservation sites, tennis courts, open grassy fields with mature trees, and adobe buildings built by the Public Works Administration. The park serves as a primary recreation resource for many residents of Menlo Park, North Fair Oaks, East Palo Alto, and Redwood City. It is also frequented by visitors from outside the south county area.

In 2014, the County's Parks Department ("Department") assessed the condition of Flood's amenities, and determined that its condition warranted a complete overhaul. This led to the creation of the Re-imagine Flood Park Project ("Project").

To determine how Flood could best serve the public and what amenities were most desired, the Department conducted an extensive public engagement process that lasted eight months. More than 500 individuals participated in six workshops, including residents from Menlo Park, North Fair Oaks, East Palo Alto, Redwood City, and Atherton. Members of the Siena Youth Center and Sheriff's Activities League, and representatives from the Menlo Legends Baseball Club, local high schools, youth soccer advocates, Little League Baseball, volleyball groups, and the UC Berkeley Master Gardeners of San Mateo and San Francisco participated as well. The Department also received 220 responses from on-line and in-person surveys. Lastly, the Department coordinated with the City of Menlo Park and the North Fair Oaks Community Council to gather feedback regarding the project and disseminate project updates. With information gathered throughout this process, the Department prepared the 2015 Landscape Plan (Attachment A).

On November 5, 2019, the Department presented the 2015 Landscape Plan and its Environmental Impact Report to your Board for consideration. During public testimony, concerns were expressed regarding (1) the proximity of the multi-use soccer/lacrosse field to neighboring residences on Del Norte Avenue, (2) noise levels generated by programmed use of the sport fields, and (3) the accuracy of visitor projections. As a result, your Board directed the Department to re-evaluate the 2015 Landscape Plan to determine if revisions could be made to resolve these concerns.

Upon re-evaluation of the data collected during the Project's public engagement process, speaking with other park agencies that operate sport fields, and analyzing potential environmental impacts created by relocating proposed amenities, the Department prepared the 2020 Landscape Plan (Attachment B). The Department presented the updated landscape plan, which is further detailed below, to the public via a virtual workshop on October 13, 2020, and at a Menlo Park Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on October 28, 2020.

DISCUSSION

1. 2020 LANDSCAPE PLAN

The 2020 Landscape Plan reflects input gathered throughout the Project's public engagement process, including from public testimony at the November 5, 2019 Board of Supervisors meeting. The 2020 Landscape Plan includes the rehabilitation of Flood's existing baseball/softball field, as well as the addition of a new multi-use sport field which runs across the baseball/softball outfield. A second multi-use soccer and lacrosse field is proposed to be positioned along Bay Road on the southern edge of the park. Both fields will be large enough to support programming for youth and high school sport practices and games.

The tennis courts will be relocated, and situated outside the 100-foot setback from the houses on Del Norte Avenue. The pétanque court will be removed to allow for additional parking. A promenade traverses the center of the park providing access to new all-abilities playgrounds and an adventure play. Consistent with the 2015 Landscape Plan, additional proposed improvements include a bicycle pump track, a demonstration garden, a basketball court, an amphitheater, volleyball courts, and renovated picnic and reservation sites. The existing quantity of picnic and reservation sites will remain the same, but sites will be relocated to accommodate new amenities.

The public has requested throughout the process that mature trees be preserved to the greatest extent possible. In that spirit, the 2020 Landscape Plan is anticipated to only impact 72 trees, eight fewer trees than the 2015 Landscape Plan. Therefore, the landscape plan will preserve approximately 92 percent of all trees within Flood, including all heritage trees.

The Department maintains its intent to preserve all adobe buildings in the park and to conduct the necessary seismic retrofitting, including to the administrative building, which will eventually serve to support community events. The only building incapable of being preserved and seismically retrofitted is the Restroom D building, which will be razed.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A. DRAFT AND FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REVIEW

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”), the Department released a Notice of Preparation (“NOP”) of an Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”) for the project. A 30-day public review/comment period was opened and San Mateo County (“County”) received 20 comment letters in response to the NOP. Seventeen additional comments were received at an EIR scoping session. Feedback focused on preserving the aesthetics of Flood and protecting biological and cultural resources. Concerns regarding noise impacts and localized traffic congestion were also voiced.

As required by CEQA, the September 2017 Draft EIR analyzed potential project impacts associated with: aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hydrology and water quality, noise, and traffic. To evaluate potential impacts that could result from use of the improvements proposed in the 2015 Landscape Plan, consultants used population projections for long term growth in Menlo Park and Atherton and projected 2021 near term traffic conditions and 2040 long term traffic conditions.

The Department received 79 comment letters during the Draft EIR’s public review and comment period in September 2017, some of which expressed concerns regarding noise, proximity of multi-use sport fields to houses, potential loss of mature trees, localized parking and traffic impacts, and air quality. The Department also received a letter from the City of Menlo Park seeking to discuss and possibly collaborate on traffic flow impacts and mitigation measures.

The Final EIR, published in May of 2018, included responses to all 79 comments.

The Final EIR determined that traffic congestion at the intersection of Bay Road and Ringwood Avenue was the only impact, of the 10 potential environmental impacts identified by the September 2017 Draft EIR, that could not be feasibly mitigated to a less-than-significant level, and which would thus require a Statement of Overriding Consideration in order to certify the EIR.

B. REVISED EIR

Members of the public expressed concerns regarding two aspects of the May 2018 Final EIR: (1) the projected growth in park usage resulting from the 2015 Landscape Plan, and (2) projected noise levels generated on-site from concurrent park events. Department staff thought these concerns warranted further consideration, and tasked the Project’s consultant with conducting additional analysis to prepare a revised EIR. The Draft Revised EIR (Attachment C) projects visitor use

estimates in a more conservative manner than in the May 2018 Final EIR based on analysis of forecasted peak usage, i.e. by evaluating the maximum number of visitors that could reasonably use all park amenities simultaneously, such as what might occur during concurrent use of the baseball and soccer fields, as well as simultaneous use of playgrounds, picnic sites and reservation facilities. Visitor data was secured from the cities of Redwood City, Belmont, and San Mateo to reflect use patterns that could be similar to Flood.

In accordance with CEQA, on May 8, 2019 the Department released a NOP of a Revised EIR for the project. The County received 12 comment letters during the 30-day public review/comment period. The Revised EIR entails changes to the executive summary, introduction and environmental setting, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, noise, traffic, and project alternatives chapters. The County recirculated these chapters for public review and comments. Because of changes in the CEQA guidelines, new wildfire and energy chapters were added and circulated. All other issues were adequately addressed in the May 2018 Final EIR.

The Department then circulated the Draft Revised EIR for a 45-day public review/comment period from August 9, 2019 to September 23, 2019. The Department received 16 written comments, and then received 11 additional comments during a public meeting held at the Fair Oaks Community Center on September 17, 2019. The Final Revised EIR (Attachment D) includes responses to all comments. In addition, all impacts and mitigation measures identified in the Final Revised EIR can be found in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (Resolution, Exhibit B).

Based on the directive given by your Board on November 5, 2019, the Department prepared the 2020 Landscape Plan. Analysis of the 2020 Landscape Plan conducted by the project's environmental consultants concluded that there are no new or significant environmental impacts created by the proposed changes (when compared to the 2015 Landscape Plan), and therefore, in accordance with CEQA, the Final Revised EIR did not need to be recirculated. However, an Errata to the Final Revised EIR (Attachment E) is required to clarify and correct non-material information therein, specifically: (1) the revisions made to the landscape plan, (2) the updated peak visitor use projections, (3) the revised peak parking demand, (4) the new noise estimates generated by traffic and programmed use of the athletic fields, courts, and reservations sites, and (5) the adjustments to responses to comments from the Original EIR and Revised EIR. The Department presented the 2020 Landscape Plan and its Errata to the public via a virtual workshop on October 13, 2020, and at a Menlo Park Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on October 28, 2020.

While the Draft Revised EIR identified potential impacts that may result from use of the proposed improvements, including noise, parking capacity, and transportation, as described below nearly all of these impacts would be less than significant or can be mitigated to a less than significant level.

Noise-The potential noise impact created by organized sporting events can be mitigated by prohibiting air horns, requiring permits for sound amplification equipment, and limiting organized athletic practices and games to 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Parking Capacity-The estimated peak parking demand for the 2020 Landscape Plan is 380 parking spaces. This exceeds the 2020 Landscape Plan's parking capacity of 369 parking spaces by eleven parking stalls. While there is a negligible difference between the two, 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 negligible difference between projected parking demand and planned parking supply is not considered an environmental impact by CEQA guidelines.

Transportation-Senate Bill 743 (Vehicle Miles Traveled) has replaced level of service as the primary metric for evaluating a project's impacts on the transportation system with vehicle miles traveled. With this revision to the CEQA guidelines, the 2020 Landscape Plan will not have an adverse impact on the transportation system because local residents will have to travel a shorter distance to access sport fields.

The only significant and unavoidable impact identified, which will require a Findings of Facts and a Statement of Overriding Consideration in order to certify the Final Revised EIR (Resolution, Exhibit A) is as follows:

Anticipated increase in traffic noise on Ringwood Avenue during projected Saturday peak use (Noon to 4 p.m.). The 2020 Landscape Plan will have a significant and unavoidable impact on traffic noise. However, restricting weekend use of athletic fields at Flood County Park to reduce traffic noise would not fulfill the project objective to meet demand for active recreation facilities in San Mateo County.

The Final Revised EIR includes: (1) responses to comments that were submitted regarding the Draft Revised EIR, (2) additional mitigation measures, and (3) an Errata to clarify minor revisions that do not raise any significant impacts. CEQA Findings of Facts and a Statement of Overriding Consideration have also been prepared. A summary of all identified impacts, mitigation measures, and residual impacts after mitigation can be found in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan, which is incorporated in the Final Revised EIR.

NEXT STEPS FOR PUBLIC OUTREACH

Should your Board approve the 2020 Landscape Plan and certify the Final Revised EIR, including the CEQA Findings of Facts and Statement of Overriding Consideration as well as the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan, the Department will issue a Request for Proposals seeking a design firm to develop detailed project designs, plans, and specifications for the 2020 Landscape Plan. The design phase will include a robust public engagement process to determine the final location and dimensions of park amenities. This process is anticipated to take 12 months to complete. After the 100 percent final designs have been adopted by your Board, it is estimated that construction of Phase 1 will take an additional 12 to 18 months.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the resolution and Final Revised EIR as to form and content.

FISCAL IMPACT

Appropriations for the design phase are included in the Department's FY 2020-21 Adopted Budget. The Department will collaborate with the San Mateo County Parks Foundation to raise additional funds as anticipated construction costs may exceed current budgeted amounts.