



COUNCIL REPORT

DATE: May 10, 2022
CATEGORY: Consent
DEPT.: Community Services
TITLE: **Parks and Open Space Update**

RECOMMENDATION

Receive an update about the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan and related projects identified in the City’s Strategic Work Plan to increase access to parks and open space in Mountain View.

BACKGROUND

The City is committed to increasing access to parks and open space for active and passive recreation uses to maintain and enhance the high quality of life in Mountain View. Since 2010, the City has developed seven new parks totaling approximately 5.5 acres. Within the next couple months, two new parks will open totaling 3.2 acres. Additionally, more than 5.5 acres of new open space are currently in the design phase. **Based on current data, the City is expecting to create, on average, one to two new parks per year through the year 2030.**

Council’s commitment to open space and enjoyment of the City’s natural environment is further demonstrated in the Council’s Strategic Priorities. Adopted in June 2021, these Strategic Priorities include: “Livability and Quality of Life,” which focuses on providing parks and open space; “Sustainability and Climate Resilience,” which supports protecting our ecosystems; and “Mobility and Connectivity,” which includes expansion of green corridors and streets for safe and inviting use for walking and biking. There are four initiatives in Council’s Strategic Work Plan (also referred to as the Strategic Roadmap Action Plan) that will be carried out to accomplish these Strategic Priorities: a comprehensive, action-oriented Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, a Biodiversity Strategy, a Community Tree Master Plan Update, and an Active Transportation Plan.

Progress on these important initiatives has been delayed due to the staff time needed to provide resources to the community and adapt City programs and services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including opening and helping operate the first mass-vaccination site in the north County at the City’s Community Center. At the same time, the community’s use and appreciation of parks and open space in the City have increased. Staff recognizes the public’s interest and sense of urgency regarding the need for progress on parks and open space planning.

This report is intended as an update to Council and the public regarding the timelines for moving these projects forward. The four plans will accomplish related and mutually reinforcing priorities for the benefit of the community and will be developed and implemented through collaboration across the Community Services, Public Works, and Community Development Departments. This will ensure a more successful outcome as well as efficiencies in data collection, analysis, and recommendation review.

ANALYSIS

Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan

Overview of the Plan

The purpose of the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan (Plan) is to define a clear vision and action plan for the future of Mountain View's parks and open space, trail system, recreation facilities, and recreation programs and services. The City's last Parks and Open Space Plan was adopted by the City Council in 2014, and the Recreation Plan was adopted in 2008. Combining these two documents will create a cohesive plan that will address the open space needs of the community and identify and analyze the variety of programs that utilize these spaces and associated facilities.

One of the many outcomes of the Plan will include a review of the City's current parks and open space system. The City utilizes a variety of open spaces to meet the City's goal of providing three acres of open space for every 1,000 residents. This goal will be reviewed at a Citywide level by population and by planning area population. The different types of property currently counted toward the goal include: City-owned park space; privately owned property that is accessible to the public during the same hours as City parks; and non-City-owned property that has limited access hours. The Plan will provide the City with recommendations on how to calculate the number of acres per 1,000 residents for open space not owned by the City with limited hours of access.

Additional recommendations will be provided in an effort to increase park land development in the City, including land use and development practices, suggested changes to the Park Land Ordinance and potential new revenue measures to meet identified long-term parks and open space needs.

An essential element of developing this Plan is to engage the community and seek public input in a variety of ways, including public meetings, stakeholder interviews, pop-up opportunities at City events and in neighborhood parks, and much more. A dedicated webpage will be created for the public to receive updates and learn when the public input opportunities will be available. **The City looks forward to working with the many residents who use City parks and open space and who have expressed great commitment to expanding access to these important community resources.**

Draft Plan Scope

The Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan will be developed with the assistance of a consultant with experience and expertise in helping communities plan for and achieve their parks and open space goals, to be selected through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. The draft scope for the consultant's work and Plan components is below.

- Assess community needs through a comprehensive public engagement process, including community meetings, surveys, pop up opportunities at City events, and stakeholder interviews as well as a comparative analysis of surrounding cities. The community needs assessment will specifically address walkability and access to parks and open space, local and regional athletic fields programs, and the City's overall nonvehicular connectivity and trail systems;
- Inventory existing parks and open spaces, trail systems, and recreational facilities. Review planned projects and inform future capital improvement projects for developing, redeveloping, acquiring, and expanding these assets;
- Review existing Community Services Department and Citywide policies and fee structures related to programs, services, and scheduled use of parks, open space, and recreation facilities;
- Utilize updated 2020 Census data to analyze population growth in each planning area since the 2014 Parks and Open Space Plan and forecast future development throughout the City to determine long-term park acreage needs based on the City's goal of providing three acres of open space per 1,000 residents;
- Define the different types of open space available in the City, including, but not limited to, City parks on City property, privately owned open space with public access during the same hours of City parks (POPA), and open space locations that provide public access with limited hours;
- Review open space locations that provide public access with limited hours, such as school-owned open space, and recommend how to calculate this acreage into the City's total open space;
- Recommend a variety of funding strategies to meet long-term park acreage needs;
- Provide recommendations to update the Park Land Dedication Ordinance to increase open space through development;

- Create a park maintenance management plan to ensure all parks are maintained to stated standards, including recommended intervals to renovate and update parks over time;
- Assess the current staffing model of the Parks and Recreation Divisions and make recommendations based on existing and future service levels; and
- Establish milestones for measuring progress and recommend strategies to make the Plan and its status accessible to the public, including recommended reporting intervals for providing updates to the community, Parks and Recreation Commission, and the City Council.

Plan Timeline

Staff is currently developing the RFP scope to select a consulting firm to assist with developing the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan. The following is the **estimated timeline** for Plan development and implementation. The timelines may be adjusted once a consultant is hired and the essential steps of developing an implementable plan are further defined.

- Review the scope with the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and City Council: September 2022
- Issue a Request for Proposals: October 2022
- Hire consulting firm: Q1 2023
- Conduct community engagement, gather and assess essential data, develop recommendations, and identify funding strategies: Q2 2023 to Q3 2023
- Present Plan for Council adoption: Q4 2023

The Community Services Department and the consultant team will work in coordination with the Community Development and Public Works Departments. Community Development will provide information regarding anticipated residential project projections and how the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan may relate to the City's General and Precise Plans. Public Works will help identify current or future projects that may relate to recreation facilities and amenities and parks and open space connections or improvements. Public Works will also coordinate the development of the Active Transportation Plan with the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan's recommendations for trails and open space connections.

Biodiversity Strategy

The City of Mountain View is developing a comprehensive Biodiversity Strategy (Strategy) to preserve and enhance the diversity of plants, trees, and wildlife in parks and on other public and private lands. The Strategy will create guiding principles and build upon the City's existing plans and projects that affect and influence biodiversity. In addition, the Strategy will articulate a vision that incorporates the principles of protection, restoration, design, and community engagement. It is anticipated that the Strategy will influence other City policies and plans, including the Heritage Tree Ordinance, Landscaping Ordinance, Lighting Ordinance, Community Tree Master Plan, Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, the Active Transportation Plan, and Shoreline Wildlife Management Plan.

Staff is currently engaged with the San Francisco Estuary Institute as a key partner in this project and will utilize a secondary consultant group to assist with the community engagement component of the Strategy.

The following is a draft scope for the Strategy:

- Define biodiversity, analyze existing conditions data, and provide recommendations to expand, connect, and restore the City's ecological network;
- Identify opportunities to partner with agencies and organizations to establish/restore biodiverse habitats throughout the City;
- Create biodiversity recommendations for existing and future park facilities to expand the planting of native vegetation and pollinator habitats;
- Guide the development of standards and creation of incentives for landowners to increase biodiversity values on private property;
- Create an urban forest plan to preserve and enhance tree canopy by establishing updated standards for landscaping, tree protection, removal, and replanting;
- Guide the development of bird-safe design and lighting standards on public and private property;
- Guide the development of green infrastructure and green streets standards for public and private property;
- Recommend the creation of specific public engagement opportunities that would further the goals of the Strategy through education and stewardship; and

- Develop a Citywide biodiversity monitoring plan.

The following **estimated timeline** for the Strategy may be adjusted once a consultant team is hired and the project scope and actions are refined:

- Present the scope to the Parks and Recreation Commission: June 2022
- Hire a consultant: Q3 2022
- Present the Strategy for Council adoption: Q2 2024

The Community Services Department is working closely with Public Works and Community Development on this project and will collaborate to carry out a phased approach, including an implementation and evaluation plan. **The Strategy will also influence the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan by recommending how to increase the use of native plantings and pollinator habitats within existing parks and how to incorporate these elements into the design of future parks and open space.**

Community Tree Master Plan

The Community Tree Master Plan (CTMP) was developed and adopted in 2015 and serves as a guide for managing, enhancing, and growing Mountain View's tree canopy. The 2015 CTMP was intended to serve the City for 10 years, with a modest data analysis to be completed at the five-year mark to provide an update on the City's tree canopy status and an opportunity to make minor recommendations to relevant guidelines and practices. The five-year update was scheduled to begin in 2020; however, it began later in 2021 due to COVID-related impacts. The consultant team that developed the 2015 CTMP has been working on the scheduled update.

At the November 2021 PRC meeting, the PRC expressed interest in an ad hoc subcommittee to assist staff with the CTMP update. The ad hoc subcommittee was created at the January 2022 PRC meeting, and, in April 2022, an update on the subcommittee's work plan and a summary of work completed to-date was reviewed. During that meeting, the PRC and the public expressed a desire for a more robust update to the CTMP that would include a comprehensive review of the City's objectives related to the urban forest. The input included a sense of urgency for the City to respond to current drought conditions and impacts of climate change.

Given the feedback heard from the public and PRC, as well as the overlapping intended outcomes and concurrent timelines of the Citywide Biodiversity Strategy, the opportunity exists to incorporate the CTMP goals, objectives, and implementation into the Citywide Biodiversity Strategy rather than create a new separate CTMP. The Citywide Biodiversity Strategy would include a chapter entitled Urban Forest Plan (or similar) that would replace the existing CTMP.

The Plan would include the following:

- Assess the City's current tree canopy and forestry efforts with the goal to preserve, enhance and grow tree canopy, and ultimately increase biodiversity throughout the City;
- Review surrounding agencies' urban forest policies and procedures to identify best practices;
- Review relevant City ordinances, policies, and procedures and provide recommended updates;
- Create a new street tree list that provides analysis of the recommended tree species to allow residents to make informed decisions on selecting a tree of their choice;
- Establish landscaping and tree planting guidelines for both public and private property; and
- Identify partnership and community engagement opportunities.

Through this process, the CTMP 10-year plan update will be completed earlier than the established 2025 goal by following the timeline of the Biodiversity Strategy provided above.

Active Transportation Plan

The Public Works Department is preparing to begin development of the Active Transportation Plan (ATP), another project identified in the Strategic Work Plan. The ATP will plan for an active transportation system in the City that includes public right-of-way and trails; recommends and prioritizes projects to help increase walking and bicycling; and considers how best to incorporate green streets, trees, and biodiversity along with the active transportation improvements in the City's right-of-way. Some elements of the ATP will overlap with the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, Citywide Biodiversity Strategy, and Community Tree Master Plan. The current timeline is to hire a consultant in Q3 2022 and present the ATP for adoption in Q4 2023.

FISCAL IMPACT

As part of the Fiscal Year 2021-22 Capital Improvement Program (CIP), the City Council approved funding for the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, Project 22-37, in the amount of \$750,000.

At the CIP Council Study Session on April 12, 2022, staff recommended funding a CIP project for the Biodiversity Strategy in the amount of \$500,000. As the scope of the Strategy has been further refined to include the Community Tree Master Plan, staff will be recommending an updated amount when the CIP is brought to Council for adoption on June 28, 2022.

PUBLIC NOTICING—Agenda posting.

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