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**MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
June 16, 2009
Foothill Park
3330 Page Mill Road**

Commissioners Present: Pat Markevitch, Carl King, Deirdre Crommie, Joel Davidson, Sunny Dykwel, Paul Losch, Daria Walsh,

Commissioners Absent:

Others Present: Council Liaison Espinosa

Staff Present: Greg Betts, Kathleen Jones, Rob de Geus, Donald Piana, Lester Hodgins

I. ROLL CALL CONDUCTED BY: Chair Markevitch

II. AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, and DELETIONS: None

II. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS: None

IV. BUSINESS:

1. Recommendation to City Council to Adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration and the Foothills Fire Management Plan – Action

Lester Hodgins, Supervisor of Open Space, introduced Kelly Morariu, Assistant City Manager; Ms. Morariu explained why the Parks and Recreation Commission were discussing the Fire Management Plan again. Previously, the Commission could only give feedback and not a recommendation because the plan was still in CEQA for review. At the May 18th City Council meeting, some environmental concerns were raised. The Council decided to send back the Fire Management Plan to the Parks and Recreation Commission for further study and their recommendation to adopt the plan.

Staff Hodgins explained how the meeting would proceed. First there will be site visits to various locations in Foothills Park to explain some of the features of the plan, and then we will return to the Interpretive Center for a presentation about treatments and mitigations that balance fire protection with protection of habitat.



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Before proceeding on the tour, Staff Hodgins introduced the consultants, Carol Rice and Tay Peterson. He also asked the Commissioners and the public to take note of example prescriptions that were developed for the meeting, Staff Hodgins explained what the prescriptions were (recommendations for what specific sites need, such as roadside clearing, mowing, ignition prevention, defensible space). He then described the area tour and invited everyone to the first stop, the rear parking lot near the Interpretive Center.

Consultant Rice described what treatments and mitigations would be appropriate for the particular site, citing the example prescription. She showed an example of what 30 feet was and what 100 feet was from the site. She said that defensible space must be within 100 feet of a structure. Consultant Rice pointed out that more clearing needs to be done within the first 30 feet; there is more flexibility in the further 70 feet she said.

Questions from the Commissioners and Public at this site consisted of the following:

- Q: Who would train and supervise people doing the work? A: professional biologists or biological monitors, on site during work if necessary.
- Q: What devices are used for mowing? A: Mowers, Weed whips, grazing animals; the word “mowing” is used broadly.
- Q: Does defensible space have to be done annually or every 5 years? A: Yes, annually up to 100 feet from structures. Trees may not need treatment every year, but grasses would.
- Q: Identified all candidates for prescriptions? A: That is part of the implementation of the plan. Some are identified in FMP, can ID more.
- Q: Who decides what’s protected? A: consultants, staff, biologists
- Q: What about other things beyond protecting people and structures – wildlife, plants?
A: Yes, lots of flexibility in the plan. Use of adaptive management to assess and change if necessary.
- Q: Is there consideration for timing of treatments relative to what different species need? A: Yes.
- Q: How do we translate message to contractors so important plants, animals are protected? A: Prescriptions must have a map, mitigation measures require that all people get trained.
- Q: Surveys made for other wildlife? A: Usually in the spring, such as for nesting birds.
- Q: Is there an inventory? A: Yes, in FMP.

The group then moved to the next site location which was at the front of the Interpretive Center. Consultant Rice described the area and referred to the example prescription sheet. She described specific treatment methods for the particular site. She pointed out flagging tape that indicated 100 feet from the building describing that

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there are always trade offs and some flexibility that landowners and homeowners have regarding which plants get removed or shortened. Invasive weeds are targeted first so native plants are encouraged to grow.

Staff Hodgins pointed out turf areas across from the Interpretive Center. He said that it is a designated temporary refuge in case of fire. He described a 10-foot roadside clearing treatment, which was indicated by flagging tape along the road.

Questions from the Commissioners and Public at this site consisted of the following:

Q: What about preserving annual wildflowers and other plants that prevent erosion on road cuts, etc.? A: Considered and in FMP.

Q: What is roadside clearing done for? A: reduces chance of ignition from things thrown from cars, etc. Reduces fuel, heat from fire is therefore less.

The group then moved up the road towards Orchard Glen. Consultant Rice described evacuation routes and roadside clearing. She talked about prescriptions for this road site. Ms. Rice said that green materials, such as native plants, need not be removed. Dried annual grasses and other non-natives need to be removed or mowed, for example. Some volunteer scrub oak trees were pointed out as candidates for removal because of their position at the very edge of the road, it was mentioned that they are not healthy for operations or for tree.

Questions from the Commissioners and Public at this site consisted of the following:

Q: Can the trees be transplanted instead of cut down? A: Not worth it (from P. Heiple of Acterra).

Q: Why is some of the mugwort dead? A: From roadside spraying. An example of how we need to monitor contractors; sprayers were only supposed to work along rocks on other side of road.

The group then moved on to the third site the Pine Gulch picnic area. The possible treatments were described, such as mowing, removal of some shrubs, trimming low hanging branches.

Staff Hodgins pointed out Sudden Oak Death considerations, which means trees are dying and dropping. For the hazard trees that have fallen, the smaller parts are chipped on site and spread as mulch. The larger pieces are left to decompose naturally.

Staff Hodgins pointed out that there is 10 foot clearance around barbecues. No prescription sheet yet. Consultant Rice pointed out possible treatment options for the area, which has scrub and chaparral, by reducing chamise and encouraging native grasses

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in site. She said leave the big things such as the oaks, remove the little fuels that can act as ladders, such as chamise and coyote brush. Again she pointed out that there are trade-offs.

Questions from the Commissioners and Public at this site consisted of the following:

Q: How do we prioritize the money? A: Roadside mowing of evacuation routes is first, which gives firefighters an extra 20 feet of room (10 feet each side) to work in. Also remove traffic hazards, so Page Mill Road would get attention first rather than inside Foothills Park.

Q: Should we remove barbecues in this area? A: Have done some of that in other picnic areas, especially Encinal. We have closed Wood Fern picnic area due to dying trees that are hazards and have added tables and barbecues to Orchard Glen. There is not as much use of the Pine Gulch and Encinal area, but they act as overflow on busy weekends and holidays.

Q: Should we change to propane barbecues? A: Infrastructure for that would be an astronomical cost, and high maintenance costs. Charcoal does not spark embers such as wood does, so it is relatively safer.

Consultant Rice described hierarchies of what to save, what to remove. A madrone tree, sticky monkeyflower, deerweed (natives) should stay; remove chamise based on flammability. In general natives stay greener longer.

Q: Who decides what to do where? A: From the prescriptions, which are developed ahead of time, with a biological monitor if needed. Important plants and animals can be protected with construction fencing, and have an on site monitor.

Q: What is the cost of a biologist? A: About \$85/hour. FMP provides for \$100,000 for first 5 years for surveys, etc. That's why we need volunteers.

Q: Can volunteers be monitors? A: Yes.

Q: Can a staff member be assigned to be in charge of all this? A: That would be nice.

The group then moved back to the Interpretive Center.

Consultant Rice gave a slide presentation on treatment types for fire protection and Consultant Peterson presented mitigation measures to protect habitat.

Chair Markevitch opened the meeting up to oral communications from the public.

(Pat wrote these down on the respective pieces of paper)

Public comment closed at 6:00pm.



Commission questions and comments:

Commission Losch:

- Q: What are private property aspects? A: FMP has recommendations for changes to city ordinances. The plan targets areas next to private property for treatment.
- Q: How does private property fit in? A: Life safety is first, such as evacuation routes, and defensible space must be cleared. Work by city should not harm private property.
- Q: What about money? A: If not there, then we don't do as much.
- Q: Is there an outreach program for private property owners? A: (B Cimino, PAFD) Yes. FD is holding meetings soon. Q: Prescription sheets seem sound, but not clear on methodology for creating them. A: Done by site. Use many experts for input. They are living documents.

Commissioner Davidson:

- Q: Is there a formal way to create a committee for input? A: Already have staff teams, and a Foothills Forum, and there will be citizen input on all environmental issues. Seems that environmental issues are lower priority than fire management in the FMP, he would like to see a balanced approach towards plants and animals and people and property.
- Q: Also concerned about prescribed burning in FMP. A: It's one option. Tight controls. Mostly grassland. Idea is not to let it get into the bigger fuels.
- Q: What are costs for hand crews vs. machinery for doing work? A: See p. 79. It is cheaper to use machinery within 10 feet of road. Crews are \$1000/day; machinery \$200/hour, but get much more done.

Commissioner Crommie:

- Q: What is adaptive management? A: It's where you have a plan using best practices and expert input, then try the plan, assess it, change if necessary, improve, revise, note what works, and continue on.
- Q: Concerned about the dollars, going into saving property vs. saving environment. A: The prescriptions should address that.
- Q: Do we get or have researchers data? A: Yes. use Stanford students, e.g., so not completely reliant on volunteers. The prescriptions should address that.

Commissioner Walsh:

- Q: Based on presentation, priorities are not the same as mentioned on p. 65 in plan. A: See page 9 for priorities. Life safety is first.
- Q: Some priorities simultaneous? A: Yes.
- Q: Are prescriptions public documents? A: Can be. Can add to the motion.

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Q: Will biologists and the fire department be involved in creating the prescriptions? A: (Roger Bloom, PAFD) Rangers better suited to do that. (Hodgins) PAFD would be involved in specific sites as needed.

Commissioner King:

Q: Commissioner King asked Council Liaison Espinosa what does council want?

A: Council Liaison Espinosa responded Council recognized that the plan was solid, but there was concern, it was not clear if environmental impacts had been looked at or been studied enough as raised by partner organizations.

Commissioner King thanked Consultants Rice and Peterson. He also would like it put in the recommendation that there be annual comments by the public on the plan.

Commissioner Dykwel:

Q: Concerned with cost of implementing the plan. It looks like it only has containment costs, the biological parts are not taken care of. A: (Hodgins) Always asking how to balance. Get in experts and interested parties such as Friends of Foothills Park in advance of projects, such as hydrant water line with Los Altos Hills Water District and restoration of the POST property in Arastradero by Acterra.

Q: Money for that not shown in the plan. A: Monies are high level. \$100,000 allotted for biological surveys, etc.

Commissioner Markevitch:

She fears cuts of funding, so keep volunteers.

Council Liaison Espinosa:

To narrow conversation, best to give recommendation on these items:

Assessments (consultants or whoever)

Public involvement (who, how, when)

Monitor and maintain

Costs

Staff training or role

Staffing issues should be addressed with City Manager.

Motion made by Commissioner King to recommend and seconded by Commissioner Walsh. Discussion followed and two amendments were made to motion.

Motion: We recommend that City Council adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration and the Foothills Fire Management Plan with the additional recommendations to include 1) an annual assessment, to include public stakeholder comment and participation of the Plan's implementation and revisions; and 2) consideration of the allocation of dedicated resources to

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insure that habitat conservation goals of the Plan are met, including the development and use of localized area Prescription Sheets, as provided to us during our meeting, and an ongoing monitoring of plan.” Approved: 7:0

V. ADJOURNMENT

Adjourned at 6:53pm.

