



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

TO: PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: Sheila Canzian, Director of Parks and Recreation

PREPARED BY: Dennis Frank, Landscape Architect

MEETING DATE: November 5, 2014

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY DRAFT REVIEW OF LAURELWOOD PARK & SUGARLOAF MOUNTAIN OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDATION

Review the draft Amendment document, take public comment and provide input.

BACKGROUND

In January 2007, after a two-year public review process, the Management Plan for Laurelwood Park and Sugarloaf Mountain Open Space was adopted by the City Council to establish policies for the management of the City's largest park and open space landholding and to identify future improvements within it. The major improvements that were identified in the Management Plan's Master Site Plans included renovating Upper Laurelwood Park and developing a trail system. At the time the Management Plan process was taking place, there were no planned trails on Sugarloaf Mountain. However, people were hiking up the mountain the best way they could and many used the very steep remnants of the fire break cuts that once were carved into the mountain. Also at that time, the first priority for the use of available Capital Improvement funds was targeted in Upper Laurelwood Park. In 2011 a new play area, along with a new restroom, native garden, picnic areas, and pathway improvements were completed.

Shortly after the completion of the improvements to Upper Laurelwood Park, City staff was approached initially by three members of the public interested in seeing that hiking trails be implemented to the top of the mountain with a more gentle slope than what people were using for trails. It was also discovered that as a result of repeated usage in one particular area of the site by hikers, a narrow trail alignment had become established on the mountain through the Oak Woodlands. This trail alignment originated at the existing culvert that passes under the main paved trail (Tenderfoot Trail) in Laurelwood Park where the two forks of Laurel Creek meet. The group of trail enthusiasts (Trail Group) began to increase in size and included

members of the Trail Center, a non-profit volunteer organization on the peninsula dedicated to trail planning and construction. They proposed to realign the existing trail so that it would be an easier and a more pleasurable experience to hike to the top of the mountain. Staff agreed to allow the Trail Group to define a new alignment for staff's review and approval. Consistent with the existing Management Plan, a plant study was conducted by a qualified biologist to confirm that no special-status plants of significance were found within the proposed new trail alignment. Having found none, the Commission was provided an update on the revised trail alignment in January 2013 with Commissioners expressing support for the project. Following a year-long construction period, the Trail Group completed the project in June of 2014.

About a year ago, the Trail Group approached the City again and suggested that additional trails be constructed. They provided the City with a plan recommending the additional alignments for trails. Many of these trails were not shown on the Master Site Plan included in the adopted Management Plan and staff required that before any more trail projects are implemented that the Management Plan be amended.

In the early spring of 2014 the City hired 2M Associates, a Landscape Architectural firm that has extensive experience in trail planning, to examine the additional trail alignments proposed by the Trail Group; to identify a new trail system for the site; and to prepare a document that would amend the Management Plan to achieve that purpose. 2M Associates met with representatives from the Trail group and city staff and walked the entire site to better understand the alignments they were proposing. Attachment 1 is the draft of the proposed Amendment document.

Management Plan Amendment Document

The Management Plan Amendment document focuses on changes to the adopted plan's trail system as well as incidental adjustments to its Habitat Compartmentalization Zones to better coordinate these zones, which help prevent the spread of fire, with the new trail alignments. The pattern of trails included in the adopted Management Plan were found to be too impractical and/or not conducive to directing use in a way that would prevent the creation short cuts between them which in turn could cause subsequent erosion and other resource damage. Figure 6 depicts the proposed trail segments and other trail features, and refers to the listing of trails on Table 1 (page 11) for information about each of these the trail segments. The trail segment numbers relate to the map key on Table 1 and are used in the explanation below.

As depicted in Figures 1 and 2 of the document, the Emergency Access Road and Bicycle Trails (Salson Trail and Tenderfoot Trail) are to be retained as called for in the adopted Plan. Most of the proposed hiking trail changes would take place on Sugarloaf Mountain. The realignment of trails identified in the existing adopted Management Plan and the development of additional trails would provide multiple loop trail experiences for hikers. Many of the proposed trails at the higher elevations of Sugarloaf Mountain follow existing social trails (trails resulting from repeated travel through the same area) along the remnants of bulldozed fire breaks that were created several years ago. Four vista points have been identified along these trails.

A new alignment for an Accessible Trail (Trail Segments 4, 5 and 6) is proposed from Salson Trail that meanders up to the top of the mountain ending at 3 vista points (North Point, Center Point and Sugarloaf Peak). However, in order for this trail to be deemed fully accessible a portion of the Salson Trail must also be developed to meet these accessibility guidelines as called for in the existing Management Plan.

Trail Segment 10 serves as both a hiking trail and a patrol trail and is therefore proposed to be a wider (6 feet wide) trail. The trail originates on the existing Salson Trail at a point on the trail that will cause the least impact in terms of grading. This point of origination lies within the City Limits of Belmont so trail development will need to be coordinated with the City of Belmont.

There are two proposed trail alignment modifications in Laurelwood Park. One is along a portion of the Creek Overlook Trail (Trail Segment 1) which runs parallel to Laurel Creek on its north side between the parking lot on Shasta Drive and the existing trail over the dam. Midway in between there is a drainage ravine. The existing trail currently travels down into the ravine through an ephemeral stream, then back up the other side. Instead of continuing down into the ravine the modification calls for trail to run along the top of both sides of the ravine to a point where the ravine narrows and a bridge can be placed. The other trail modification (Segment 11) proposes to provide steps from Overlook Court to Creek Overlook Trail where it meets the existing paved trail that crosses the dam.

Review Process

Following our typical process for the review of Master Plans and Master Plan Amendments, the first step is to present the Draft Management Plan Amendment to the Park and Recreation Commission for its review and to take public comment. Following this meeting comments will be compiled and examined by staff and 2M Associates to determine if changes need to be made with the intent of preparing a final document along with an environmental document. Once that is complete the Management Plan Amendment and the accompanying environmental document will be available for formal review consisting of a public comment period of 30 or 45 days depending on the type of environmental document needed as determined through an Initial Study. Upon completion of the formal comment period comments will be examined, responses provided in writing, and the Management Plan Amendment will be brought back to the Park and Recreation Commission for formal review and its recommendation to the City Council for adoption.

Patrick Miller with 2M Associates will be in attendance at the upcoming Park and Recreation Commission meeting to present the Draft Management Plan Amendment document, listen to the input received and respond to questions posed by the Park and Recreation Commission. This Draft document has been submitted to the Director of Parks and Recreation of the City of Belmont and we have received a positive response relative to the plan. The City of Belmont Park and Recreation Commission will also be reviewing the plan on November 5.

BUDGET IMPACT

Funds to complete the Management Plan Amendment are currently budgeted in the department's Capital Improvement Program. Currently there is an unencumbered balance of \$70,000, \$50,000 of which are from the Jane Baker Bequest which has been targeted towards improvements on Sugarloaf Mountain for the creation of trails and the restoration of fire breaks. The preliminary estimate to develop all of the new trails and to renovate existing trails where currently needed is \$3,200,000 broken down as follows:

- \$1,600,000 for 0.82 miles of multi-use paved trails consisting of the renovation of the existing paved trail leading from Glendora Drive entry to where it connects to the more recently improved pathway in Upper Laurelwood Park along with the existing trail between Upper Laurelwood Park and the Laurelwood Drive Entry, and the upgrade and paving of the existing dirt trail from Upper Laurelwood Park to the Belmont Border.
- \$1,600,000 for 3.43 miles of single-use pedestrian and hiking trails, including trail signage and other trail features such as steps, bridges, low walls, etc. Although the Patrol Trail and most likely the proposed ADA trail will need to be constructed through contract work, it is estimated that if volunteer efforts are continued in the creation of a significant portion of the proposed hiking trails, a savings of between \$250,000 and \$500,000 may be realized.

As the trails are built over time, more resources will be needed to patrol, maintain and manage them and the surrounding open space. The adopted Management Plan's total estimated additional annual cost to inspect and maintain trails and to remove trash in areas adjacent to them was estimated in 2007 to be \$20,600 at full development. With inflation this figure would be closer to \$28,000 per year. The Proposed Management Plan Amendment proposes slightly more than twice as many single-use pedestrian and hiking trails as is included in the adopted Management Plan. Therefore it is estimated that another \$30,000 will be needed annually to maintain these additional trails for a total of \$58,000 per year when they are fully developed.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The Management Plan Amendment will require environmental review. The type of environmental document needed will be determined through an Initial Study.

NOTICE PROVIDED

Post Card Notices have been sent to residences and owners within 1,000 feet of Laurelwood Park and Sugarloaf Open Space including those who live in Belmont. In addition notices have been sent to those who attended the meeting of the City Council when the Management Plan was adopted in January of 2007. All Homeowner's Associations have also been notified about the meeting. Notices were also posted at the park site. The Draft Management Plan Amendment was also placed on the City's website.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Draft Management Plan Amendment

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