



CITY of CALABASAS
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: JUNE 15, 2020

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS

FROM: JEFF RUBIN, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION FROM CITY COUNCIL ON ALTERNATIVES FOR WILD WALNUT PARK

MEETING DATE: JUNE 24, 2020

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council discuss and provide direction on alternatives for Wild Walnut Park.

BACKGROUND:

Wild Walnut Park was acquired in 2001 and consists of approximately 10 acres on the corner of Mulholland Highway and Old Topanga Canyon Road. Since the acquisition of the park, and with a goal to keep it natural in it's setting, staff has worked to: develop a walking trail (approximately ¼ mile in length) at the base of the park; add native plants; develop a picnic grove for gatherings; place seating areas and interpretative signage in the park for rest stops along the trail; and establish a parking area for visitors.

Over the years, "east side" residents have approached staff about having more park/play opportunities similar to those on the "west side" of the city such as, De Anza Park, Gates Canyon Park and Grape Arbor Park. The "east side" of town, in which Wild Walnut sits, currently has smaller parks and some come with limited access and limited hours. These facilities include the Calabasas Tennis & Swim Center, Creekside Park, Freedom Park and Highlands Park.

Staff received direction in early 2015 to investigate the opportunities and desire of the community on the “east side” of the city. We were advised to work with the Parks, Recreation & Education Commission (PRE) to complete this goal of providing a natural themed play environment concept at Wild Walnut Park and then to share the ideas with the community at a public workshop.

At the PRE Commission meeting on March 9, 2015, a Wild Walnut Park Subcommittee was developed and tasked with making recommendations that would lend itself to enhancing the beautiful setting that Wild Walnut Park already provides. The subcommittee would then take the recommendations to a community meeting to get additional feedback and finally formalize a plan. Staff anticipates that the desired location for any kind of play equipment be back behind or beside the existing picnic grove where there is currently a relatively flat area away from parking and the highway.

In June of 2015, an on-line survey was conducted in eNews to gather the “pulse of the community” and to further explore the idea of placing a naturally themed play environment at Wild Walnut Park. The majority of the feedback was in favor of moving forward with the idea. At the June 22, 2015 PRE meeting the commissioners reviewed the results and feedback and recommended staff move forward with a community workshop to gather ideas.

A “Wild Walnut Park Possible Playground Workshop” was conducted on July 21, 2015 with approximately 25 in attendance, including Councilmembers and Commissioners. The goal of the workshop was to further ascertain if there was support for the idea of putting a naturally themed play environment at Wild Walnut Park and if so, to gather specific ideas on naturally themed playground equipment. Staff took the group through the results and feedback from the June eNews survey and then led them through a discussion on the different types of amenities they might like to see at Wild Walnut Park.

After receiving and listening to the feedback and comments of the community, the playground features would be more of the bouldering and climbing type structures using natural looking material in both its colors and representation. Along with the playground equipment, the parking lot would undergo some enhancements to better distinguish parking spots. Interpretive signage would be increased to identify the parks wonderful features, its wildlife and native plant life. A drinking fountain and/or restroom could be included in the design or at a later phase if this is the desire of the Community, PRE and City Council.

As the City budget became impacted by the loss of certain revenue sources and subsequent restrictions, any idea of adding amenities to Wild Walnut Park was placed on hold.

The Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District (RPOSD) is responsible for implementing the Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches Measure of 2016 (Measure A). Seventy-five percent (75%) of Los Angeles County voters approved Measure A in November 2016. This approval authorizes continued dedication of local funding for grant projects and their maintenance through an annual charge of 1.5 cents per square foot of building floor area on all taxable real property in the County. Similar propositions in 1992 and 1996 allocated funds to Calabasas and were key components in the purchase of the Calabasas Tennis & Swim Center, building De Anza Park, building the Agoura Hills/Calabasas Community Center and for funding several park projects over the years.

Measure A makes funding available to eligible recipients for projects that repair and upgrade parks and recreation facilities, preserve and protect open spaces and beaches, and support recreational programming. Measure A implementation also includes efforts to update and maintain the 2016 Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (Needs Assessment) process and its data. It will utilize available technology to facilitate grant applications and provide efficient oversight. The architecture of Measure A aims to respond to the findings of the Needs Assessment by increasing the quantity and the quality of parks, recreation facilities, beaches and open spaces throughout Los Angeles County, with an emphasis on the areas of highest need.

I was honored to be a member of the implementation Steering Committee for Measure A (Steering Committee) which provided guidance and made decisions at key steps of the implementation process. The Steering Committee consisted of approximately 45 members with expertise in parks, recreation, and open space, as well as related local community issues in Los Angeles County. As many of you know, I also served on the Needs Assessment Steering Committee in 2015 and 2016.

The RPOSD worked with a consulting team, with input from the Steering Committee, to develop eligibility criteria for grant funded projects, refine technology solutions, and establish a methodology for updating the Countywide Parks Needs Assessment data, among other tasks.

In a nutshell, there are both non-competitive and competitive grants to apply for. The non-competitive grants (per capita) coming to the City of Calabasas is approximately \$94,000 per year with another \$23,000 per year in Maintenance and Servicing (M&S Funds).

With a continuous funding mechanism it will be important to update/incorporate new priorities/projects into the Parks and Recreation Master Plan that was adopted by City Council in 2005 and is posted on the City website. Wild Walnut Park is identified in this plan as a passive park facility with a future connection to the Environmental Education Center that is across the street. It was mentioned to possibly include a naturally themed play environment along with other potential amenities. Through community workshops, the PRE and ultimately the City Council, we can enhance upon what Wild Walnut Park currently offers.

A sub-committee (Laurel Ford, Charlotte Meyer and Heath Patton) of the PRE met with staff on July 26, 2017, to discuss both assumptions and process, as staff was preparing to come before the City Council. It was highly suggested by the sub-committee that this time around we do the following:

- Explain the process to the community and how any ideas/plans will move through the City processes.
- Incorporate input from all east side residents and not just those in the immediate area around Wild Walnut Park.
- Explain that this exercise is to plan for additional amenities at Wild Walnut Park and no other land is under consideration, such as Creekside Park or parcels for sale.
- Explain that any additions to Wild Walnut Park will tie into the rustic ambiance of the facility.
- Explain that additions to Wild Walnut Park can be built in phases as funding becomes available.
- Explain that adding amenities to Wild Walnut Park is not an arbitrary decision, but rather one that is identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

On August 23, 2017 the City Council provided staff with direction to move forward on the Wild Walnut Park Master Planning. Below are some of the comments from Councilmembers:

- Have the PRE discuss and initiate a Public Workshop.
- Return to Council by the end of 2017 or early 2018 with a recommendation and timeline.
- Review and mitigate any safety concerns.
- Create a more active facility and return with a Resolution changing status from passive to active.
- Maintain the beauty of the facility with a natural look.
- Come up with a phasing concept of amenities.
- Determine if other facilities around have a youth playground and a dog park on the same location.
- Pros/Cons of having a restroom in major thoroughfare.
- Find additional funding sources.

In the 29 years since Calabasas was incorporated, the City has developed a very high level of park and recreation services. Despite a constraint on land available for active use parks, the City has acquired or built an impressive array of facilities. The level of programming is extensive, and a high percentage of Calabasas citizens participate in the City's recreation activities. The City also has been an active steward of the natural environment, acquiring open space and partnering with other agencies to protect land. Overall, the City has established an extremely successful recreation program and park system.

The main challenge for Calabasas in the coming years will be expanding its physical facilities to meet currently unserved recreation needs. The community has expressed a need for additional facilities, such as more soccer fields, east side park/playground, community garden and an east side dog park to name a few.

At the September 11, 2017 City Council Meeting, Council directed staff to do the following:

1. Conduct a community workshop for amenities to be added to Wild Walnut Park.
2. Initiate design concepts along with a phasing plan.
3. Return to Council with a recommendation from the Parks, Recreation and Education Commission along with a Resolution changing the park designation from passive to active.

A Community Workshop took place on Saturday, November 4, 2017 from 9 a.m.-Noon in the Founders Hall with 77 participants (69 Residents/8 Non-Residents). The following constitutes the results from the workshop:

USER GOALS

Which Statement Best Describes Your Vision for New Amenities at the Park? (Choose One) 76 Votes

- It will be a destination for me and my family on a regular basis - 6
- It will be a place for me to engage in a healthy and active lifestyle- 21
- It will be a place where I can go to meet with friends and enjoy the outdoors- 49

The Park Should Principally Focus On (Choose One) 70 Votes

- Amenities for Youth- 5
- Amenities for Adults- 6
- Amenities for Both- 59

The Park Should Serve both People and Canines (Choose One) 71 Votes

Yes- 66 No- 5

PREFERENCES

The Park Should Have a Restroom (Choose One) 73 Votes

Yes- 49 No- 24

The Park Should Incorporate a Dog Park (Choose One) 76 Votes

Yes- 66 No- 10

The Park Should Have a Community Garden (Choose One) 72 Votes

Yes- 43 No- 29

The Park Should Have a Playground (Choose One) 76 Votes

Yes- 39 No- 37

The Park Should Have Expanded and Better Defined Parking (Choose One) 72 Votes

Yes- 60 No- 12

I Would Prefer... (Choose One) 56 Votes

- A playground for Tots (2-5) Only- 6
- A playground for both Tots and Youth (5-12)- 50

Please indicate your preferences by putting as many or as few of the 5 dots on each of the next 5 categories: (372 dots used of a possible 385 dots)

Playground Component- 38

Dog Park- 223

Restroom- 36

Community Garden- 35

Parking Lot- 40

There was also a comment board located at the last station where attendees were able to leave us with some comments/thoughts. Following are the comments that were added to the board:

What else would you like to see incorporated? I think it would be great to have...

- Fence to keep coyotes out
- Lock gates at reasonable hours
- Trail connection into the hills
- More hiking trails
- Sidewalks leading to the park
- Two gates when entering the dog park
- Wide dirt path allowing 2 toddlers to ride bikes side by side
- Keep the environment in original state-preserve the scenic corridor
- Allow bicycles-a trailhead for bikes
- White Oak & Victory dog parks are excellent examples
- Chumash theme playground
- Safe crossing to Headwaters Corner
- Incorporate similar designs- complementing the park with Headwaters
- Snake fences
- Ficus Trees because they do not shed and they provide shade
- Many benches
- Trash cans and dog waste bags
- Thousand Oaks dog park is an excellent example-we need huge size
- Grass dog park only - real or fake woodchips are annoying and dirty-difficult to pick up dog feces
- Two dog areas (one for small and one for large)
- Traffic light at Old Topanga and Mulholland Hwy

- Leave it wild
- Keep the coyotes in
- Public bulletin board-residents can post notices
- Shade (either natural or canvas) for both dogs and people
- No bathrooms
- A gated park so it is safe for children. There are not enough parks for kids on the East end of Calabasas
- Outdoor innovation camp designed for kids (and adults). 3 picnic tables required with electricity
- Keep it wild-no development
- Fitness Stations like at Brandon's Village
- Right hand turn lane from Old Topanga to Mulholland
- Baseball field
- Water fountain for both people and animals each
- Do not develop- Use Creekside instead
- No further development-leave as is
- Botanical Garden-only native plants with educational signs

Staff began working with Jeff Maxwell of JMD Landscape Architecture, Inc. on implementing the top community choices into a park design.

On June 11, 2018 the PRE met to discuss the Wild Walnut Park Master Plan and went through both options. After discussion, the PRE voted 5 to 1 to recommend Option 2 to City Council mainly due to the two defined areas for small dogs and large dogs. The PRE was mixed on the public restroom component but as staff explained, if the Master Plan is moved forward that the amenities would be built in phases and the restroom could be a later phase or excluded all together.

On September 26, 2018, City Council agreed with the PRE Recommendation on Option 2 with some requested modifications. After discussion Council asked staff to return in early 2019 with an updated Option 2 Plan and estimated costs. On March 11, 2019, the Pre reviewed the updated plan and provided comments and input in preparation for City Council.

On April 10, 2019, City Council approved staff to move forward with the development of design and specifications for Wild Walnut Park Improvements and to bid out the project as a whole and not in phases. The scope of work for the project includes earthwork, permeable parking, ADA accessible features, a drinking fountain, an off-leash enclosed dog park, children's play equipment, portable restroom enclosure and other amenities.

The project was advertised for bid on April 6, 2020, with a bid opening scheduled for May 13, 2020. The bid opening for the project was conducted via Zoom Teleconference, due to City Hall being closed to the public. There were six bids submitted for the project. The decision to award the project was based on the lowest responsible and responsive bidder. The lowest bid amount was \$578,185.77. However, the lowest bidder was deemed non-qualified due to not meeting the requirement of sub-contracting not more than 50% of the work. The lowest contractor also failed to submit the required hard copy of the bid documents; therefore, the City cannot award the project to the firm. The second lowest bid amount was \$643,722.95 and with general fund money required for a large portion of the project, City Council rejected all bids at their June 10, 2020 meeting.

City Council requested that staff return with alternatives for the Wild Walnut Park Improvement Project.

DISCUSSION:

The following are several options for the Wild Walnut Park Improvement Project:

1. Advertise the project as is and see if the bids come back differently;
2. Advertise the project as a phased/whole approach and see how these bids come back;
3. Value engineer and see where we might be able to modify design/specifications and prepare documents for bid;
4. Work with our Public Works Department to determine if any area of the project might be able to fall under another funding mechanism;
5. Add temporary features to Wild Walnut Park as we work through a long term budget solution.

If a temporary option is chosen in the short term such as fencing and surfacing for a dog park, staff will work with our current contractors on pricing and installation options to accomplish this task. Funding for such an option would most likely need to come from the general fund.

Staff spoke last week to our Measure A Grant Administrator and we put our approved project on hold with the County. Our currently approved grant allocation for the project from the County is \$187,809.53. If we wait until September 15, 2020 an additional \$93,904.77 can be added through a project amendment increasing our grant allocation for Wild Walnut Park to \$281,714.30.

FISCAL IMPACT/SOURCE OF FUNDING:

The current grant funds approved by the County for this project is \$187,809.53, with the balance coming from the General Fund or other Unidentified Funding Sources. By waiting until September 15, 2020 and amending our grant agreement with the County at that time, an additional \$93,904.77 can be added to the project agreement.

REQUESTED ACTION:

It is requested that the City Council discuss and provide direction on alternatives for Wild Walnut Park.

ATTACHMENTS:

None