

CITY OF ALAMEDA

Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From: John A. Russo
City Manager

Date: May 7, 2013

Re: Endorse a Preferred Conceptual Plan for a Passive Recreational Use
Program at the Future Alameda Beltline/Jean Sweeney Open Space
Park.

BACKGROUND

The Alameda Beltline/Jean Sweeney Open Space Park is a 22-acre property bounded by Constitution Way, Atlantic Avenue and Sherman Street. It is the largest piece of the total Beltline property purchased from Southern Pacific/Alameda Belt Line Railroad (Exhibit 1). The City closed escrow in 2010 and completed the final step of abandonment and rail-banking agreements in October 2012. Due to the advocacy efforts of local resident Jean Sweeney, the property was secured at its original purchase price plus improvements for just under \$1 million instead of the market value of over \$20 million.

As part of the property sale, a rail-banking agreement was included in which a 40' strip of contiguous land must be available for potential future rail use, such as a light rail. This area may be located anywhere within the property but a permanent structure may not be built on it.

Because of its previous uses, remediation may be required prior to any construction. A Phase 1 environmental study concluded that there are minimal levels of contamination at the east end near the historical rail office building. After a Phase 2 environmental study is completed, which would include soil sampling, soil clean up can begin.

In an effort to better understand the community vision for the park, staff conducted an extensive community input process. Two community meetings were held with over 240 people in attendance. In addition, staff posted a survey on-line and in print at ARPD facilities, and received 659 responses. One of the outcomes of this process was that many people volunteered their time and skills for everything from site clean-up to professional services such as landscape design, grant-writing, and marketing.

At this time, staff is seeking direction from City Council to confirm the conceptual uses of the property, not to develop specific details or to legally bind the City to any specific

plans. Once the recreational uses are confirmed, a conceptual design will be developed in conjunction with appropriate environmental review documentation pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Grant and private funding will then be pursued to fund possible remediation, specific design, and construction. Development of the Alameda Beltline will be a long-term, multi-phase process based on funding availability.

DISCUSSION

As discussed above, staff conducted two community meetings, developed, compiled, and analyzed the results of a preference survey, and held many informal conversations with interested members of the public. The following is a compilation of the information gathered through those efforts. Although the information collected is not statistically valid it, does represent a broad range of the community interests in a qualitative way.

The predominant theme expressed by the community is a desire for passive use types, such as gardens, paths, and open space. However, there was a strong contingency of advocates for an aquatics center. In addition, a significant number of people from the survey expressed an interest in a regulation competition running track. Limited support was expressed for athletic fields such as football, soccer and baseball at the community meetings and on the survey. See Attachment 2 for survey results and "dot" boards from the meetings.

Specific use ideas most commonly expressed throughout the community input process include:

- Community garden:
 - Option for one large 1 – 2 acre garden adjacent to the Food Bank or two smaller gardens with one on each end of the Beltline; and
 - Strong potential collaboration with Alameda Backyard Growers, Alameda Point Collaborative, and Project Leaf.
- Walking/Biking Trails:
 - Class I paved bicycle/pedestrian trail based on Caltrans standards, as defined by the Cross Alameda Trail Plan, Bike Master Plan and Pedestrian Master Plan;
 - Add smaller natural trails that diverge from the main path with separated trails for pedestrians and bicycles;
 - Natural, narrow bike trails that can be utilized for off-road bike users (BMX and mountain bikes);
 - Native plants and trees landscape;
 - Benches; and
 - A circular walking/running loop with a natural ground pad.
- Historical and environmental educational markers and interpretive signage.
- Renovate the historical railroad building for concessions or a railroad museum.
- Picnic areas.
- Add topography such as small hills.

- Natural-based children's playground:
 - Include a natural or sculptural water play structure; and
 - ADA play structure.
- Onsite parking to draw traffic/parking off of residential streets. Locate parking at the east and west end on the major streets.
- Trees and/or an orchard. These can be located on south side and used as a sound barrier for residents.
- Aquatic center:
 - Competition size pool available for swimming and water polo;
 - Water play area; and
 - Indoor (many, not all swim advocates expressed interest in this option).
- Gathering space for outdoor theater, music, educational presentations. Requests included a simple amphitheater style or a gazebo with a suggestion to generate revenue through wedding rentals. However, numerous residents expressed a strong desire for no amplified sound.
- Regulation size competition track.
- Fenced, off-leash dog park.

The four uses that scored highest on the survey with support of over half of the respondents (300+) are a community garden, natural open space habitat for wildlife, picnic areas, and walking/biking trails. This is shown on Attachment 2.

Alameda residents discussed many other noteworthy ideas including:

- Safety lighting and lights on main bicycle/pedestrian path for evening commuters.
- Eco-friendly development:
 - Water sourced from wells/high water table;
 - Composting toilets;
 - Roof water catchment and filtration;
 - Graywater irrigation;
 - Solar lighting/solar panels;
 - Recycled materials; and
 - Remill the old railroad ties currently onsite.
- A model railroad museum in the historical railroad office building in collaboration with the Empire Builders Model Railroad Club.
- Create an endowment to fund ongoing maintenance.
- Pond for ducks, frogs and other wildlife.
- Urban agriculture:
 - Collective for people to graze goats, chickens, pigs, bees. A potential collaboration with Alameda Backyard Chickens and a local proposed community farming organization; and
 - Collective for farmers to grow food and sell locally to residents and restaurants.
- Natural artwork through collaboration with Oakland Museum of CA.

Although there is also a committed group of swim advocates interested in an aquatics facility and supporters of a running track, a clear picture has emerged of the community's desire for more "passive" uses. Accordingly, after the Recreation and Park Commission discussed the conceptual uses at their March 14th meeting and heard additional community feedback, the Commission recommended that the conceptual use plan include passive uses with six components including:

- Walking/bike trails
- Natural open space
- Picnic areas
- Community gardens
- Playgrounds
- Open lawn areas

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Construction and on-going maintenance are currently unfunded. Passive uses have potential grant funding sources and options to be built with volunteer assistance in addition to lower ongoing maintenance costs. Active uses such as a swim center are generally funded by private/corporate donations and private partnerships.

There is no financial impact to the City as a result of this action. A conceptual design will be developed with the volunteer assistance of local landscape architects. Future construction will be funded primarily through grants and private donations.

MUNICIPAL CODE/POLICY DOCUMENT CROSS REFERENCE

This action does not affect the Alameda Municipal Code.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

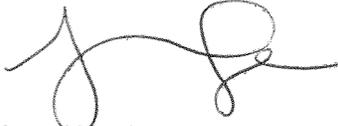
As the City develops a project description for potential uses and physical improvements to the site, all appropriate environmental review will be conducted prior to any such approvals or actions and possible impacts such as, noise, traffic, and other relevant issues will be studied.

Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15262, endorsing this conceptual plan is statutorily exempt from further review. This plan serves as a planning and feasibility study for possible future actions which the City has not approved, adopted or funded. Endorsing the Plan does not legally bind the City Council, the Recreation and Parks Commission or City staff to any possible future action. This action does not require environmental review and as the City develops a project description for potential uses and improvements to the site, appropriate environmental review will be conducted.

RECOMMENDATION

Endorse a preferred conceptual plan for a passive recreational use program at the future Alameda Beltline/Jean Sweeney Open Space Park.

Respectfully submitted,



Amy Wooldridge
Recreation and Parks Director

Financial Impact section reviewed,



Fred Marsh
Controller

for

Exhibit:

1. Map of Total Beltline Purchase
2. Community Input Meeting Boards and Survey responses

Alameda Beltline/Jean Sweeney Open Space Park
Community Input - Use Types
(Data from Survey only)

What are some of the uses you think are important to include in Alameda Beltline park space? (check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Basketball Court	15.1%	99
BMX/Mountain Bike Trails	11.7%	77
Bocce Ball	15.2%	100
Community Center	18.4%	121
Community Garden	46.5%	305
Dog Park	22.7%	149
Natural Open Space Habitat for Wildlife	54.9%	360
Open Lawn Area	39.2%	257
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	23.5%	154
Picnic areas	54.9%	360
Playground	43.9%	288
Public Art	29.7%	195
Sand Volleyball Court	9.3%	61
Skate Park	9.0%	59
Soccer Field	15.2%	100
Softball/Baseball Field	10.1%	66
Swimming Pool and Facilities	29.0%	190
Teen Center	8.5%	56
Tennis Court	10.1%	66
Walking and Biking Trails	73.2%	480
Water Features	30.3%	199
Other (please specify)		134
answered question		656
skipped question		3

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