

City of Piedmont
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: May 20, 2024
TO: Mayor and Council
FROM: Rosanna Bayon Moore, City Administrator
SUBJECT: Receipt of the Park Commission's Annual Report 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Receive an informational update on the Park Commission's Annual Report. No action required.

BACKGROUND

The Park Commission is submitting an annual report to City Council in accordance with Section 25.13 of the Municipal Code, which states that each commission shall submit in writing to the City Council a report assessing those programs and activities concerning their respective area of responsibility.

At the March 6, 2024 Park Commission meeting, a subcommittee was formed to draft the report. The subcommittee consisted of three Park Commissioners: Tom Smegal, Arden Hall, and Barbara Giuffre. Their draft report was presented and discussed at the April 3, 2024 Park Commission meeting.

The Park Commission's 2024 Annual Report is attached for review.

By: Daniel Gonzales, Director of Public Works
Nancy Kent, Parks & Projects Manager

City of Piedmont
Council Agenda Report

Date: May 20, 2024
To: Mayor and Council
From: Tom Smegal, Chair of Parks Commission
Subject: Park Commission Annual Report to Council

Background:

Section 25 of the Municipal Code offers that the Commission shall provide an annual report to the City Council:

Annually, on or before the first day of May, each commission shall submit in writing to the City Council a report assessing those programs and activities concerning its respective areas of responsibility, including the submission of programmatic and fiscal recommendations as appropriate. Each body shall also be responsible for submitting such additional reports as necessary or as requested by the Council. (Ord. No. 395 N.S., §16)

Park Commission Meetings and Activities

The Park Commission met eleven times between April 2023 and March 2024. At various meetings, members of the public attended and spoke to the Commission on a variety of topics, both on the agenda and in general session.

The Commission conducted its responsibilities with respect to street tree selection and management, approving several new and replacement street trees and approving removal of certain trees at Staff's and the public's request. In addition, the Commission reviewed and commented on a recent computerized inventory of Piedmont's municipal trees, both street planting and park trees.

The Commission further advised staff and made various recommendations to Council about parks projects and activities in accordance with its mandate.

Primary among these activities were the recommended approval of new pathways both at Dracena Park and Crocker Park. In the case of Dracena Park, the Commission welcomed extensive public comment about path design and location as well as vegetation management and other amenities. As a result of the Commission's efforts and Commissioner expertise, the path design was rerouted to minimize disruption to the character of the park area.

The Commission also participated in the public process to evaluate and comment on the Moraga Canyon specific plan and had early input into the efforts to memorialize the Dearing family at the corner of Wildwood and Magnolia.

We again accepted nominations for Heritage Trees, recognizing 5 trees or groups of trees in 2023 with particular aesthetic, historical, or natural characteristics worthy of celebrating.

Finally, in 2023, we celebrated Arbor Day with an event at Community Hall. It featured exhibits on native plants, wildland fire protection, the Piedmont tree inventory, and public works vehicles. Unfortunately, as in years past, the event was lightly attended and is being revised in 2024.

Future Focus of the Parks Commission

While the Commission has handled its duties and supported City Staff in its efforts in the parks, as a group we have expressed an interest in encouraging more of a longer-term strategic focus for the Commission. Our membership, which includes landscape professionals, native plant experts, infrastructure experts, and other valuable skill-sets, is motivated to focus on strategic initiatives such as stewardship, climate adaptation, meeting community needs for park space, and encouraging community involvement in our parks. To this end, we are working with Staff to support certain short- and long-term initiatives in our parks and with our street trees, which should have an ongoing positive impact on the quality of life in Piedmont.

Stewardship Initiative

In response to Commissioners' comments, at our March 2024 meeting, Staff presented a draft outline of what could become a strong Sustainability and Stewardship Program for Piedmont's parks. Staff's outline was modeled on the ReScape program of the Alameda County StopWaste, the framework focuses on water and energy conservation, habitat renewal, erosion control, and other factors. Other potential strategy components of interest to the current Commission include physical infrastructure master plans and reviews of current desired uses in the parks. Commissioners believe that by adopting a longer-term framework, City Staff, in conjunction with the Commission, can focus on longer-term climate-adaptive improvements to parks.

The Commission is cognizant of the limits on Staff time and the City's budget. We understand and support the request from Director of Public Works Daniel Gonzales to fund a consultant effort to develop a Sustainability and Stewardship plan in the 2024-2025 budget. Outside consultants with experience developing similar plans could be used to bring insights from similar communities and best practices to the project.

Infrastructure Replacement

While long-term infrastructure maintenance, development, and rehabilitation should be part of any strategy the City develops, in the coming year the Commission is interested to see the previously budgeted project to replace the irrigation system at Piedmont Park move forward. Our understanding is that Director Gonzales has also requested budget authorization in the 2024-2025 budget year for this project. While our community has benefitted from two consecutive above-average years of rainfall, drought and water scarcity are a regular feature of California's climate. We expect that the City will move forward with the design of a new system in 2024-2025. The Commission is excited to review the irrigation system design, as there have been many technological improvements in this area since the last full irrigation overhaul.

Extending the Street Tree Inventory to Develop New Options

While the recent street tree inventory and database was received with interest, the Commission is excited to use the database in future years to diversify tree species, experiment with new types and varieties of street trees to meet aesthetic, durability, and sustainability goals. We also learned that there are many vacant street tree spaces throughout town. The Commission will be looking to add trees to those locations in coming years.

Meeting Needs For Park Users

The Commission has received reports from Staff in each of the last two winters about closures of the Linda park off-leash area. We are interested in reviewing options that improve availability of park space for the designated uses and best manage park resources.

Facilitating Volunteer Efforts

In late March, the Commissioner and other volunteers took advantage of a donation of native seedlings and planted around 40 natives near the base of Bushy Dell Creek in Piedmont Park. We were assisted and supervised by City Staff. However, the success of the event highlighted the tremendous opportunities and interest in Piedmont in park cleanup and development efforts. Community volunteers hope to be able to clear non-native and nuisance vegetation, plant natives and climate-adapted species, tend to and propagate seedling plants and clean litter around our parks.

Unfortunately, due to constraints on City Staff time and a lack of historical volunteer initiatives, Piedmont has not been the easiest place to volunteer. The Commission is interested in assisting and advising Staff on development of more streamlined volunteer coordination, including release forms. We expect possibly to coordinate this effort with the Recreation Commission and staff of the Recreation Department.

Publicizing Public Work's Best Practices Landscape Management

The Commission has noted that Public Works has adopted best practices in herbicide and pesticide use and other activities maintaining our parks. We are interested in finding opportunities to publicize Public Works' best practices to encourage Piedmont homeowners to adopt them where feasible.

Conclusion

This report is the first of its kind between the Parks Commission and Council. We respectfully seek feedback from the Council to direct our City Staff and Commission's efforts in a manner that aligns with the Council's future plans for our City's parks and street trees.