

Griffith Park Master Plan – Working Group Meeting Summary – February 5, 2007

The Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group convened their meeting on Monday, February 5, 2007, at 6:30 p.m. at the Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium.

Present: Working Group – Bernadette Soter, Clare Darden, Craig Kessler, Gerry Hans, Jeff Gardner, Susan Swan, Valerie Vanaman, and Lynn Brown, Louis Alvarado

Rory Fitzpatrick, Council District 4
Patricia Malone, Council District 4

Vicki Israel, Recreation and Parks
Laura Bauernfeind, Recreation and Parks
Darryl Ford, Recreation and Parks

Absent: Jose Sigala, George Grace and Richard Bogy

Facilitator: Kevin Regan, Assistant General Manager, Department of Recreation and Parks

Mr. Kevin Regan opened the meeting by informing the members that a revised Griffith Park map was distributed. The Department's Real Estate Division, in collaboration with the Bureau of Engineering (BOE), found another parcel within the borders of Griffith Park. Mr. Darryl Ford of the Real Estate Division said the parcel belongs to Department of Water and Power, which is part of the baseball fields/Pote Field. An additional portion of the map was identified by North Atwater Park. Ms. Vanaman inquired about a portion of the map which is a golf course that is not owned by Department of Recreation and Parks. Anything green on the map is currently under the jurisdiction of Recreation and Parks. Mr. Hans followed up on the RKO property. Mr. Ford informed the working group that the RKO property is 9.96 acres and it is currently zoned as residential. Mr. Hans suggested that perhaps this could be added to a priority list for acquisition, along with Cahuenga Peak.

Mr. Regan requested that the working group date the updated maps and replace their older versions of the map. The goal is for the Department to identify each property in Griffith Park. Mr. Gardner asked if it would be necessary to add another freeway off-ramp to relieve traffic congestion without presenting any trust or legal problems at this time. Mr. Regan said it is a legal question the Department does not have an answer at this time. He will request the map to be uploaded on the web page.

Mr. Alvarado asked if a little wedge of land on the map is being occupied by the Zoo Department. Mr. Regan informed him that it is currently a veterinary facility. Mr. Alvarado's concern was for this acquisition not to further expand. According to Ms. Brown, no further acquisition would be added. Mr. Regan agreed with Ms. Brown.

Mr. Regan explained that the Master Plan meeting is different from other City's community meetings. This meeting is for the working group to encourage dialogue amongst themselves regarding issues as it relates to finalizing, developing ideas and concepts about the Griffith Park Master Plan. The working group does not engage conversations with the audience but public comments are heard at the end of the meeting.

Mr. Regan acknowledged the restoration of the Colonel Griffith statue with the soft illumination. Ms. Darden thanked the Department for having the statue cleaned and polished. Ms. Israel

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agreed and said the job was an impressive improvement to the statue's condition and thanked the working group for their patience.

Mr. Regan stated that future agenda items would include presentations on the 501(c)(3), the Los Angeles River, and the Griffith Park nursery renovation plans. Ms. Israel covered the first item on the agenda by asking if there were any revisions on the September and October summaries, which were both distributed at the January meeting. No comments were given by the group. She asked the group to review the January meeting summary and E-mail revisions and/or additions to her by end of the week. Ms. Israel informed the group that attached to the agenda are the corrected organizational charts. Mr. Hans asked Ms. Israel if they were still missing November 6th and December 4th meeting summaries. Ms. Israel said that November and December are outstanding but January summary has been provided.

Mr. Hans requested to have the Recreation and Parks website fixed to easily navigate and find the Griffith Park Master Plan site. Mr. Regan informed the group that the Department has a new Director of Systems, who has been working out system problems and hopes to add a link on the Department's main webpage.

Mr. Regan introduced Ms. Laura Bauernfeind, the Department's Citywide Urban Forester. This presentation was requested by the working group. Ms. Bauernfeind informed the working group that the handouts distributed prior to the meeting had information regarding the tree plant pallet with specific tree species, which would be planted adjacent to Pote Field. Ms. Soter asked if there are any maintenance and irrigation plans accompanying these plantings. Ms. Bauernfeind stated that the intentions of Department and the plantings with the Mayor's Million Trees Initiative Program is to plant the trees where they could be cared for, not where they would be in danger and to use the initiative to improve and enhance our reforestation. Community groups such as L.A. Conservation Corps, Tree People, Hollywood Beautification, Northeast Trees and Korean Youth Development are collaborating with the Department. Ms. Bauernfeind stated that all the trees on the pallet are California natives but not necessarily native to Griffith Park's ecosystem. She assured the working group that these types of trees would do well in Griffith Park.

Mr. Hans pointed out that native trees attract native birds/wildlife for nesting. As an example, Nuttall and Ladder-backed woodpeckers are attracted to Agave plant stalks for nesting. These stalks seem to be chopped down. Mr. Regan said he would talk to Principal Grounds Maintenance Supervisor Tom McCall as to when this practice is appropriate and when it is not. Mr. Hans expressed that education maintenance staff is important. Agreeing with Mr. Hans, Mr. Regan said it is important for park staff to learn about some basic principles of ornamental horticultural and horticultural maintenance as it relates to a natural or native indigenous environment. Mr. Alvarado reminded the Department not to bring in non-native trees, this brings in new birds to the environment and do not survive in this habitat. Mr. Regan said redwood provides good habitat. Before leaving, Ms. Bauernfeind provided the group her contact number, (213) 485-3674 and E-mail laura.bauernfeind@lacity.org.

Mr. Regan acknowledged there was not a subcommittee report available on the Management Chapter. However, according to Mr. Hans, members should review the organizational charts provided to them.

At the last meeting, Ms. Soter mentioned investigating grouping of regional parks together or at least managing them with some of the common characteristics such as water resources and wildlife. Ms. Soter distributed a matrix of regional parks' common characteristics and said it was

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good that a Region Superintendent was created. Ms. Soter assumed that the creation of this region was personnel based. According to her, the group should address the differences of regional parks, community parks and recreation centers. According to the matrix, following are commonalities regional parks have: water resource, ecosystem, wildlife, scenic assets, historic assets, hiking trails, equestrian use, extensive bike lanes, picnic, golf, major attractions like museum or zoos, and sports fields. She reiterated that grouping parks such as Griffith Park, Debs Park, Hansen Dam, Elysian, etc would be a good idea. Mr. Hans added that there are other parks such as Venice Beach that does not fit as a regional park. Ms. Soter acknowledged that she should have listed Venice Beach on the matrix. Mr. Craig Kessler asked Ms. Soter to mark an “x” on the golf column under Harbor Regional.

While reviewing the Department’s 2005-2006 goals, Ms. Soter noticed that the goals and objectives are based on community parks, recreation centers, but did not pertain much to regional parks. Her opinion is that there is no pipeline into Recreation and Parks’ upper management regarding regional parks issues, needs and opportunities. She explained that the regional parks do not easily fall into categories in the goals and objectives. She suggested to group regional parks as one region. Another possibility she mentioned, if distance is a factor, is to group four to five relatively adjacent regional parks into one region. Mr. Regan told Ms. Soter that her observations are good. He acknowledged the list of ten facilities the Park Rangers patrol as regional parks: Elysian Park, Debs Park, Griffith Park, Runyon Canyon, Venice, Cabrillo Beach, Harbor Regional, Sepulveda Basin, Hansen Dam and O’Melveny Park.

For the working group to further understand the Department’s current organizational structure Mr. Regan explained that an Executive Officer reports to the General Manager. Reporting directly to the Executive Officers are two Assistant General Managers, one for Operations West and the other for Operations East. Operations West encompasses the Valley and West Los Angeles areas, and other Citywide functions. Operations East covers the Northeast, East, South Los Angeles, Harbor area, Griffith Park, EPPIC Center, CLASS Parks program and some Citywide functions. He continued with explaining the Griffith Region organization. He acknowledged Ms. Israel as the Region Superintendent having Griffith Park and other duties as well. Superintendents have to manage a large geographical region. When the fifth superintendent was placed into the Department’s budget, the management had to come up with a large geographical area and duties that were significant enough to rate a Superintendent. The City Administrative Office did not agree that Griffith Park alone was large enough. To compensate for that, management added Citywide functions. Each region is in-charge of certain Citywide function/s. These Citywide functions are spread throughout the Department. Camps, Municipal Sports, Citywide Forestry, and Citywide Facility Repair are under Griffith Region. Also, under this region are a few facilities such as Pershing Square, Runyon Canyon, Yucca Recreation Center and Wattles Mansion. This region was not created based on a particular person’s abilities.

It would be possible to build a Citywide regional park unit; however, from an operational point, the challenges would be having one individual responsible for ten facilities as they are geographically spread throughout the City.

Ms. Soter asked Mr. Regan if it would be enough to justify staffing since the regional parks encompass over 40% of City parkland. Mr. Regan replied it would be more of a long term strategy. Mr. Hans mentioned that the idea of regional parks draws from a large geographical area and a destination location for visitors. He stated regional parks have security problem. Venice Beach would be one of them. Mr. Regan stated that Venice Beach is the second largest attraction in Southern California other than Disneyland and that the areas people visit are

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Recreation and Parks properties. Mr. Hans expressed that he doesn't think Venice Beach fits to be a regional park. According to Mr. Regan, this is a planning exercise; it would be difficult for the Department to change the current definition of regional parks due to Rangers deployment/reorganization. The Master Plan is a planning process and this idea could work but would have to look into putting together a structure for how it could be successful. He stated that the Griffith Region Superintendent's focus to Griffith Park has at least increased 75% more by an individual high ranking in the Department since Griffith Park used to be part of Griffith-Metro Region, the busiest region with the most number of facilities. Mr. Regan added that Ms. Israel has been giving almost 100% focus on Griffith Park.

Ms. Soter stated that they were not discounting the great job Ms. Israel has done. She referred to the Melendrez Draft, and said the passive recreation is largely invisible to the management. Mr. Regan said that Ms. Soter's statement is nothing but an assumption. She corrected it by saying it is invisible to the Melendrez Draft. As an example, Mr. Regan mentioned he supervised Hansen Dam and Sepulveda Basin when he was the Valley Region Superintendent. He also told the group that both passive recreation and active recreation exist in all parks across the City.

The problems of a multi-layered system to run Griffith Park were brought up. As a manager of facilities all over the City, it would be a challenge to attend meetings and community meetings since City of Los Angeles is a large area. Superintendents are executive managers in-charge of geographic areas. Mr. Regan said this manager is able to focus on the area and doesn't have to travel all over the city. If there would be one manager in charge of all the regional parks, a management structure under the manager would be necessary, which currently does not exist.

Ms. Vanaman questioned what the implication of the second sentence on the Melendrez Park Management Chapter Draft was and quoted it, "Streamlining internal operations implementing systems attract and monitor park performance and creating mechanism to community based partners...." Mr. Regan replied by saying that park and recreation operations across the country have similar issues and in the last fifteen years, the operations has improved. Currently, the controller's audit shows that the Department is lacking maintenance management computer system that could initiate work order, track projects, goals, personnel, forms, etc. As a result of the audit, the Systems Division is currently working on a computerized system for the maintenance staff to use. He added that some operations could be streamlined and cited a couple of examples. Ms. Vanaman asked about tracking expenditures at individual park level. According to Mr. Regan, some are tracked at the individual park level but some can only be tracked after the money has been spent.

Ms. Vanaman asked in what level in the management chart personnel decisions are made. Mr. Regan explained that it depends on what level the position is. It is at supervisor level, depending if the employee is full-time or part-time. The Human Resources Division is located under the Executive Officer. Ms. Soter inquired where the Board of Commissioners falls under in the organization chart. The officers and members of the Department of Recreation and Parks Board of Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor and are volunteers. The Commissioners would be in the Mayor's organizational chart. They make decisions on legislative and policies. The General Manager directly works for the Mayor.

Ms. Soter asked how the Board of Commissioners impact Mr. Regan and Ms. Israel. According to Mr. Regan, the Commissioners are extremely involved and they have a wide range of backgrounds. The Commissioners review and research the reports prepared by Department staff. Staff is questioned before reports are approved.

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Mr. Gardner stated enhancing the computer systems for staff would save money and staff travel time. Mr. Regan stated the service yards are strategically positioned close to the area of responsibility. The City of Dallas is currently rebuilding the Parks Department and has a 1.8 billion dollar restoration plan. This plan addressed service yard upgrades and improvements, which no city has addressed before. Mr. Ford stated the City of Dallas is on their third year of the master plan. Currently, they have spent approximately 700-800 million dollars in public and private monies. Mr. Ford said that a management system has been implemented to track each facility, which is available on their website. Mr. Ford will provide the group handouts regarding the Dallas Master Plan presentation management received. Mr. Kessler asked if the Dallas bond is any different with L.A. City and County bonds, where there's only money for capital improvements but no money allocated for the operational costs. Dallas is facing the same bond restrictions as City of Los Angeles.

Mr. Alvarado expressed that he cannot understand how the money is being allocated. He wanted to know who controls these types of issues throughout the City. Mr. Regan explained that some projects are phased in and some are not. Prop K is a fantastic project however, voters do not approve maintenance budget.

Mr. Hans suggested that maybe the community can be involved in the process of City projects and that the group looks at the occurrences where management has done right and wrong things. He gave an example of the 2003-2004 pedestrian bridge. Mr. Hans said that the widening of Hogback Trail leading to the bridge took out a lot of plants in that area and transformed it from a footpath to a fire road.

Mr. Alvarado said there was controversy surrounding this particular bridge since it was put in for hikers and equestrians. He stated there are approximately 300-500 hikers daily during summer time and safety of hikers is valued. Ms. Brown said that the bridge was to be put in to connect the equestrian trail however; the horses cannot use it.

Mr. Hans distributed copies Observatory West Road pictures explaining there were issues regarding rocks falling, loss of native and non-native plants, use of bulldozer, safety concerns created by the sheer cliff that now is present, and hydro mulch. According to Mr. Regan, this specific project was due to more than a few rocks falling down the road. The area was saturated with water during the storms in 2005. This was one of the areas identified where the entire slope may fall into the street, which may cause serious safety concerns. This became a FEMA project and BOE engineered it. The area lost character but due to safety issues, they did not have a choice. The Department does not hold community meetings in cases like this but could be taken into consideration. Mr. Hans' opinion was that the result of the project was more severe than what was expected. Ms. Brown could not imagine micromanaging the park and she did not agree with having a community meeting for every issue. According to Ms. Brown, the park should be able to run the way they want it without having to listen to every person around them. According to Mr. Regan, a community meeting is held depending on the kind of project's funding. Some projects require community meetings. A Griffith Park advisory committee should be created after the Master Plan Working Group concludes. The committee should focus on collaborated fundraisers, events, clean ups, etc.

Ms. Soter reminded him that before an advisory committee is set up, the PROS committee currently exists with representatives from major organizations. She said that the attendance might not be 100% but perhaps 70%. Mr. Hans added that PROS has a biologist in the group, which the Department does not have on staff. Ms. Vanaman said that the master plan's whole

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point is to provide a guideline so that when these decisions are made, there would be an outline as to when micromanagement is occurring and when it's not. Mr. Regan agreed with Ms. Vanaman.

Mr. Craig Kessler expressed his disappointment in the inefficiency that has been built for many years within the City's bids and concession guidelines. He stated that the City tends to spend more money but fewer mandates on the projects. It surprises him that there isn't sufficient knowledge in designing the outlines for bid documents and RFP documents. He feels that the practices need to change. He gave examples and apologized for going beyond the scope of the Master Plan. Mr. Regan did not argue with Mr. Kessler's point, but gave him hope for the future. He explained that the entire Concessions Unit, except for one person, has left the Department. As a result, Recreation and Parks is rebuilding this unit. Ms. Soter was curious to see the RFP for the Observatory concession. She has concerns on the contract. Mr. Regan asked Ms. Israel to check with the Concessions Section.

Ms. Vanaman informed the group she needs to retype the Mobility Chapter. Ms. Soter said she would like to sit down with Christina Iwata sometime in the next month to match documents she has with the Department's documents. Ms. Soter said that the group needs to start with the Management Chapter and would like to get ideas and input from the public comments at the end of the meeting. Ms. Vanaman suggested a draft should be prepared for the next meeting. Mr. Hans suggested that the sub-committee should meet twice prior to the March working group meeting. Ms. Vanaman added that after the Management Chapter, they would like to discuss the commitment from Recreation and Parks to help them produce a nice package. The Department's commitment to look at the environmental aspect of the plan was brought up and Mr. Regan confirmed that the Department is still committed to this. Mr. Gardner asked if Mr. Regan has access to the PDF file of the Melendrez draft. Mr. Regan believes the Department has it and some items may be re-created by Recreation and Parks staff.

The next Working Group meeting will be held Monday, March 5, 2007. This concluded the Working Group meeting for February 5, 2007.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Park management's responsibilities regarding the on-ramp and off-ramp to the park.
- Commending the Griffith Park crew who trimmed dead woods around the oaks.
- Cutting down Agave plants due to the brush clearance contractors.
- Wondered why no one took Mr. Alvarado's suggestion to get rid of the Melendrez Draft.
- Hoping to see the working group's efforts incorporated into the final master plan.
- Complaint on the trash bins behind the merry-go-round.
- Moving the administration and maintenance facilities or reorganization of CSY is beyond the capabilities of the working group.
- Are there other private-public partnerships other than the 501(c)(3)?
- Surprised how the working group has different set of rules than the Melendrez group.
- Concessions Division's impact on the Griffith Park Master Plan.
- Strategic planning process to look at the master plan to drive new revenue streams into Griffith Park.
- Reference on City Beat article which illustrated the parking structure at Griffith Park.
- Is the proposed nursery plan a concession?
- Clarification on revenue received from all the park concessions.