



Date: June 8, 2023
To: Board of Directors
From: David Aranda, Interim General Manager
Subject: Presentation & Discussion of Park Re-planting Project

Recommendation

Receive a presentation and discuss the Park re-planting Project.

Background

In conjunction with the trees in Kensington Park needing to be removed due to infestation, drought and safety issues, it was determined that a committee made up of Directors Duggan and Gough would work with the community to make improvements to the park which includes the planting of new trees.

Both directors have worked very hard to reach out to various entities and they will thus be the presenters for this projected project.

Exhibit(s)

Kensington Park Re-Planting Strategy Committee Report

Presented by: KPPCSD Board Directors Cassandra Duggan and Sarah Gough
June 8, 2023

Introduction

This committee was tasked with providing “a thoughtful approach to future re-plantings and care of Kensington Park.” To pursue this goal, we met with multiple community members, Hilltop Elementary School parents from the PTA, and Kensington Education Fund, KCC Recreation Director Jenny Parks, Fire Chief Eric Saylor, Police Sergeant Brian Lande, horticulturist Catya de Neergaard, retired landscape architect Lisa Caronna, representatives from Segorea-Te Land Trust, community members from Good Guest Kensington, native plant specialist Kirk Frye, Kensington Park landscaper Fernando Herrera, KPPCSD Park Administrator Rosa Ruiz, Timothy Cole of Blake Gardens, landscape architect Patricia Akinaga of Studio-MLA, landscape architect Anoohey Rahim of Dune Hai, and Nathan Bickart from Urban Tilth. We wish to thank all who generously gave their time and input to this project, for the good of the Kensington community.

Summary of Feedback from the Community

In speaking with community members, several common themes emerged. At least as many new trees should be planted as were recently removed. Maintaining big open spaces for kids to play and people to exercise or picnic in nature are important. Kensington Park should be a sustainable landscape with drought-tolerant and fire-wise plantings, that provides year-round beauty and shade in the warmer months. Many suggested increasing the number of trees around the open lawn area where children play and dogs romp – and choosing trees with beautiful blossoms in spring and/or fall color in autumn. Most expressed interest in a return to native trees and plants in the park, with native Coast Live Oaks consistently mentioned as the most desirable tree to plant since they are native, drought tolerant, more fire-resistant.

Many noted that old growth conifer trees, such as Redwoods, Sequoia, Jefferson Pines and Monterey Pines, are valued parts of our existing landscape and their presence should be maintained in some way. However, due to their high water needs and fire concerns, selecting appropriate conifers to re-plant will be important. Other trees mentioned included: Buckeyes, Maple, Cedar, Redwood, Redbuds, Gingko, Chinese Pistache, Ceanothus, Western Dogwood and Native Alder.

Many noted that any new plantings must be deer and child-tolerant, and ideally, low-maintenance. New trees should be properly staked and protected until fully established. Irrigation must be added in several areas, to sustain new plantings.

Many residents expressed an interest in taking advantage of the beautiful, enhanced view where the Monterey Pines were removed on Highland Avenue. A few suggested new seating to provide a place for quiet enjoyment and reflection of the view and surrounding landscape.

Some expressed interest in protecting and creating new wildlife habitats for animals and insects, including a possible pollinator garden. Incorporating art and educational opportunities was also a popular suggestion. Many mentioned forming volunteer groups to assist with park clean-ups and simple park projects, as was commonly done in the past with the Boy Scouts among others. A few community members have [expressed interest in creating a non-profit to raise money for the park and organize volunteers.](#)

Summary of Feedback from Experts

Fire:

Fire Chief Saylor suggested that native trees and plants are a safer choice, particularly those that do not shed dry needles. Tall conifers, especially Monterey Pines, tend to shed large limbs and can explode if they catch fire. Redwoods and Sequoias have higher water needs and their height can make it difficult to put out fires. It is not advisable to have tall or fire-prone trees near buildings.

Ladder fuels at the base of trees and around structures, such as the Annex and the Community center, should be removed, though some evergreen native shrubs pose less of risk due to water content. Piles of dead limbs, debris, or mulch should not be allowed to accumulate. Tall grasses should be mowed in the dry months. Large trees can normally withstand fire, if not surrounded by ladder fuels.

Lastly, Chief Saylor recommended seeking CalFIRE and other grants for routine park maintenance or special projects (e.g. fire mitigation efforts, etc.), which GM David Aranda has been pursuing.

Police:

Historically, Kensington Park has been a low-crime area. Visibility is important to adequately patrol the area, so dense bushes near seating, stairs, or play areas should be avoided. Picnic tables by the school are not recommended. Sergeant Lande saw no issues with the committee's proposed projects nor did he find other existing public safety concerns in the park.

KCC/KASEP/Recreation:

KCC Recreation Director Jenny Parks requested the addition of shade trees somewhere on the grass lawn, to shade children and staff when using the lawn for activities. She also expressed interest in the creation of a community garden near the KASEP building, which KCC would use to offer gardening classes to the community.

Horticulturalists/Blake Gardens:

Like others above, the horticulturalists advised that we plant California natives, which are generally more sustainable and drought-resistant than non-natives – choosing species resistant to fire and deer. We should plant more native wildflowers and remove poisonous or dangerous plants/invasive species like Scotch Broom. Plants can be chosen that will create or improve habitats for our wildlife and birds. Volunteer tree seedlings should be protected against weed-whacking. Using goats to remove brush can wipe out desirable seedlings and wildflowers.

Landscape Architects:

Multiple landscape architects provided great ideas of ways to utilize our on-site natural resources to create a beautiful and sustainable landscape. We have incorporated some of these ideas in our plans. Given that the design fees for these professionals are high (in the tens of thousands of dollars or more), and the district's currently available funds are limited, we do not recommend hiring a landscape architecture firm for Phase 1 of re-planting and repair. As you will see below, our recommended plan is straightforward and can be implemented by our District landscape team without issue or unnecessary expense. Should the District later receive an influx of grant or other money, we can revisit the idea of hiring a landscape firm for a more extensive re-planting project that incorporates original, artistic hardscaping and forward-thinking greenscape designs.

Ohlone Tribal Representatives:

Cheyenne Gould, Cultural Resource Manager, and Deja Gould, Language Program Manager for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Nation, met with us and shared their recommendations.

They suggested a return to native grasses, plants, and trees. Native shrubs can prevent erosion naturally, without the need for artificial hardscapes. Terracing also helps with runoff and land erosion issues. They encouraged use or re-purpose of "waste" materials rather than disposing of them in the landfill. Using wood from the cut trees for seating areas, retaining walls or fencing needed in the park. When re-planting, we should look to complementary plants since some plants compete while others support each other's growth.

Determining where and how water flows throughout the park was also suggested. Exploring where water is currently flowing, the possibility of removing obstacles to its flow, and/or re-directing the water by swales or other means, were discussed. They also recommended performing soil testing first, to identify contaminants, nutrient deficiencies, and the necessary soil amendments.

Other Comments:

Several experts discussed how to resolve drainage issues at the base of the hillside near the large grass lawn. A swale was repeatedly mentioned as a good way to take advantage of natural surface water and create an attractive feature using large rocks and water-loving plants.

Likewise, native plant experts detailed ways in which we could create and slowly expand areas with native plants only. Volunteers could be recruited, and children could be taught how to help natives thrive in our park.

Recommendation

To prioritize the most urgent landscape needs while keeping costs to a minimum, we recommend the following phased approach to re-planting in the park. Our recommendations strive to create a balance between aesthetics, fire safety, climate challenges, a healthy ecology, and affordability. They reflect the priorities expressed by the community as well as the expert feedback we received.

Phase 1: Proposed for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

I. General Plan:

Tree Plantings (13-15 new trees):

- plant approx. 8 new trees to north and south of suggested viewpoint seating area near Highland Blvd.
- plant 2-3 trees for shade near edges of grass lawn area (Redbud, Dogwood?)
- plant 2 Coast Live Oaks next to the road near Tot Lot (to retain hillside which is eroding)
- plant 1-2 Western Dogwoods to replace dead fruit trees near library
- requires new irrigation, mulch, staking, and protective wire fencing

Viewpoint Seating Area near Highland Blvd.:

- create 20-25 ft platform of base rock and decomposed granite, bordered by the same wood and in the same style as new path
- platform viewing area will have 2 small carve-out beds for native plantings and mulch (will require irrigation): approx. 9-11 plants/shrubs per carve-out
- add 2 benches (3 options):
 1. re-finish and re-locate 2 existing park benches
 2. use milled redwood from cut trees to craft 2 new 5 ft benches (see Fernando's El Cerrito contact)
 3. purchase 2 new benches like those used in Berkeley's John Hinkel Park

Replace Walking Path:

- upgrade long park path from Fire Road to KASEP building with new wood, base rock and decomposed granite

Slope Restoration (eastern slope and annex slope):

- rope off area at the top of stairs where kids' have created a path and water runs
- rake, compost, amend soil (after soil testing), sow some native wildflower seeds

- pull any noxious weeds (poison oak, poison hemlock, thistle, English Ivy, etc.)
- allow natural process to take over (no irrigation required)

Swale:

- create swale using large, round rocks at wet area at the base of the slope near the grass lawn
- add 6 new water-loving native plants, shrubs, and possibly a Dogwood tree around swale

Beside the Library:

- remove old concrete and wood
- add/spread extra mulch
- remove 2 dead/dying fruit trees
- plant 2 new Western Dogwoods (require irrigation)
- clean-up boxwoods
- remove/grind old stumps

Oak Tree with Exposed Roots by the Tot Lot Play Structure:

- add netting to base of tree by roots
- add compost and mulch
- plant 3-5 oak compatible native shrubs
- rope off until shrubs are established

II. Supplier/Contractor Recommendations:

Supplies:

- Devil Mountain Nursery: plantings
- American Soil + Stone: base rock, decomposed granite, much
- Dolan Lumber: viewpoint and path lumber
- The Urban Farmer Store: irrigation supplies

Contractors:

- Fernando Herrera + Team:
 - Clearing
 - Extra stump grinding
 - Planting
 - Installation of decomposed granite and base rock
- FJI Engineering:
 - Installation of wood retaining/seating wall
 - Repair of path on eastern slope
- Cole Rainey (Blake Gardens/UC):
 - Soil testing for pollutants/contaminants and nutrient profile on eastern slope near Highland Blvd. and by serpentine rock

Phase 2: Possible Future Park Projects for Fiscal Year 2024-2025

- KCC Community Garden:

- We encourage the KCC to propose a design plan to the KPPCSD for consideration, should they have interest in maintaining the garden for their programming. The Board could entertain paying the cost to install the initial garden infrastructure, including deer fence, planters, and drip irrigation system.
- Volunteer Park Clean-ups or Projects:
 - Coordinate with community & local groups about regular volunteer park clean-ups or projects (Hilltop, KCC, Scouts, and/or other community groups).
- Concrete or stone retaining structure at viewpoint designed by a landscape architect.
- Descriptive signage/plaques at viewpoint and/or to identify native plantings.
- Tiled labyrinth at Viewpoint
- Additional plantings throughout park
- Additional seating areas, such as in forested areas behind the Community Center and Library.
- Consider terracing eastern slope below “Viewpoint” and adding native shrubs to help retain the land
- Consider adding either a pollinator area or “Miyawaki Forest” on the open area south of the library to help retain hillside and add greenery.

Flagged Maintenance Concerns:

- Re-finish/repair all existing park benches
- Prune/clean-up dead limbs of oaks at the southern side of the park
- More frequent trash pick-up
- Quick remediation of graffiti to deter future vandalism
- Replace retaining structure near kids play area
- Add parking bollards at spaces overlooking tennis courts/playground
- Remove all fuels around community center, annex, and library
- Remove/grind old tree stumps throughout the park
- Repair retaining wall near basketball courts

Park Funding Ideas:

- Grants: apply for CalFIRE and other grants for routine park maintenance and/or special projects (e.g., fire mitigation efforts, etc.).
- Community Facilities District (CFD): explore this mechanism for offering the District greater flexibility to use the money it has and receives in the future.
- Community Fundraising: encourage community donations from local K-groups, residents, and non-profits.
- Revenue Generation through Enterprise: explore enterprise opportunities, as is done in larger parks like the Presidio through food/beverage sales etc.

