

GREATER GOLDEN HILL PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES

June 26, 2013 – Approved

NOTE: This was a special meeting called to rank park development options.

The meeting took place at Balboa Park Golf Course Club House on Golf Course Drive. Chair Ruchell Alvarez called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. The agenda had been posted in accordance with the Brown Act. A quorum was present.

Members present: Ruchell Alvarez, Richard Baldwin, Susan Bugbee, Mike Burkart, Janice Davis, John Kroll, Pat Shields, David Strickland, David Swarens, Matt Thomas.. **Members absent:** Cheryl Brierton, Richard Santini, Angela Vasconcellos..

AGENDA: Community Plan Update: Evaluation of candidate park sites identified at previous community meetings.

City staff had evaluated each of 17 potential park sites and ranked them as High, Moderate, or Low Priority. Eight committee members (Alvarez, Burkart, Brierton, Baldwin, Bugbee, Davis, Strickland, and Thomas) had submitted their own rankings to the chair. See attachment at end. Alvarez first focused on the park sites where committee members and staff were in substantial agreement, saving controversial sites for later.

Site 13: Parcels adjacent to 29th St. between B and C streets, an area of 1.59 acres. The city ranked it a High Priority, stating “The overall site provides some excellent park opportunities, with the western C St. parcels (approximately one-third of the site) being flatter and more appropriate for park development. The B St. parcels are steep, but access between B St. and C St. can be provided along the western edge. The site is vacant, but portions appear to have been previously developed. A steeply sloped remnant canyon runs from the NW to SE portion of the site; it contains mature vegetation, including palm trees. This area provides natural habitat and scenic value, but does not connect to other open space.” Committee members agreed to rank it High Priority.

Site 10: Three parcels along B St. between 27th and 28th streets, totaling .45 acres. The city ranked it a Low Priority, stating “The site is very steep and heavily wooded with eucalyptus trees and other vegetation, and contains existing multi-family residences. Site development and ADA access could be difficult and costly to provide....” Committee members agreed to rank it Low Priority.

Site 3: 2915 E St. at the corner of 29th St., an area of .48 acres. The city ranked it a Moderate Priority, stating “This is a large site with park development opportunities, which could serve the adjacent multi-family residences. Although some portions are sloped, several level areas could be graded and padded. Access is available from E St. and the alley on the south. In addition to the existing residences, there are developed patio areas and some mature ornamental landscaping, including a specimen coral tree.” Committee members agreed to rank it Moderate Priority.

Site 14: Balboa Park Golf Course adjacent to the Golden Hill Recreation Center along Golf Course Drive, with an unknown area. The city ranked it a Low Priority, noting “The golf course is to be developed per the Balboa Park East Mesa Precise Plan, which recommends continuation of the golf course uses. Conversion of the golf course to population-based park uses would require amendments to the East Mesa Precise Plan....” Committee members agreed to rank it Low Priority.

Site 4: 2796 E St. at the corner of 28th St., an area of .1 acre. The city ranked it a Low Priority, stating “28th St. is flat, and E St. is moderate to steeply sloped. Level access can be provided from both streets. However, a majority of the site is steeply sloped and topography is a constraint. Portions of the site adjacent to the streets could be developed as a pocket park. Excessive costs for accessibility and grading/retaining walls may prevent development. Committee members agreed to rank it Low Priority.

Site 1: F St. between 21st and 26th streets, with an unknown area. The plan would reduce the width of F St. to create a linear park. The city ranked it a High Priority, noting “This appears to be a good opportunity between 22nd and 25th streets, but [the area between] 21st and 22nd streets has less opportunity due to the I-5 northbound on-ramp. It is not appropriate east of 25th St. due to narrow ROW (right of way). This will require traffic evaluation to determine if it is feasible to reduce the street width.

In committee discussion, Davis, recommending a Low ranking, pointed out that air quality near a highway is lower. Burkart noted that a linear park would calm traffic and perhaps eliminate blight from the homeless. Swarens described it as more a greenbelt than a park. Shields asked if we want to spend money on this.

Most of the committee agreed that the site should be ranked High Priority.

Turgeon was asked how the city would make final priority decisions on potential parks. He replied that projects would be weighted, first comparing parks within Golden Hill, then comparing parks and other Golden Hill projects, then comparing those projects with those in other neighborhoods, then weighted against development funds, which in Golden Hill have historically been low.

Site 5C: One of three right-of-ways to existing freeways that together could form a “ring of green” throughout the community, this one borders the I-5 at 19th St. from Broadway to E St. The city, ranking this one High Priority, noted the “potential for creating a one-block linear park with views to downtown if the existing street were narrowed.... Agreement with Caltrans would be required if the property is on the Caltrans right-of-way.” The committee also ranked it as a High Priority.

Site 8: A, privately owned building at 1947 Fern St., the southeast intersection of Fern and Grape streets with an area of .22 acres, was ranked by the city Not Applicable (N/A) because it has recently been renovated and is home to an active business. The committee agreed.

Site 11: The public right-of-way at Broadway and Glendale Ave., with an area of .08 acres, was ranked Moderate Priority by the city, noting that it “could be a good pocket park accessible from both streets. The shady site is dominated by two large eucalyptus trees and has an existing stairway linking the two streets.... The steep site could be terraced; however, provision of ADA accessibility could be costly.” The committee agreed with the Moderate Priority ranking.

Site 16: Two possible pocket parks at Delevan and Ash streets, totaling .23 acres. The sites are within or adjacent to sensitive habitats and accessed through an industrial area. They could be small pocket parks with seating areas. The city ranked them Low Priority or N/A. The committee agreed.

Site 9: Seven lots along 32nd St. between Broadway And C and along Broadway from C St. east towards 32nd St totaling 3.81 acres and privately owned. The city ranked it Moderate/High Priority, stating “This is a large site with very good park development opportunities. Although some portions are sloped, there are several level areas that could be graded and padded. The site offers great views to the south and Mexico. Freeway noise issues would need to be addressed. The Public Utilities Dept. may consider acquiring the site in the future for use as a groundwater production facility. If so, an agreement for shared park/utility use could be explored.” A motion was made (Alvarez/Thomas) to rank it High Priority and passed with seven votes in favor.

Site 12: The Gala Foods site at 3030 Grape St. The city ranked it Moderate Priority and noted “the parking lot includes smaller retail users and non-permanent food trucks and can be used for special events. It could provide good park opportunities and serve as a community gateway.”

Swarens suggested making a section of it a linear park. Shields urged that it be designated N/A because it has one owner and singling it out creates animosity. Thomas asked whether the parcel would be acquired through eminent domain or the city accepting an offer to sell it. Bugbee called in “an asphalt waste land” and suggested that a High ranking might convince the owner to improve the space. Strickland concurred. A motion (Alvarez/Baldwin) to change the designation to N/A was approved with 9 in favor and 1 abstention.

Site 15: Elm and Bancroft streets, totaling .14 acres. The city ranked it Moderate Priority, noting "A very small, flat area at the top of the canyon, with an unofficial footpath leading down into the canyon.... A small pocket park/trail head could be feasible." The committee agreed with the Moderate ranking.

Site 17: The southwest corner of 32nd and Cedar streets, totaling .41 acres. The city ranked it Moderate Priority and noted "The majority of this property is steeply sloped and part of the canyon.... The very small flat area could serve as a trailhead.... It could be added to the 32nd St. canyon open space area."

Swarens asked whether management of open space areas is different from Park and Rec and was told that it is. Shields noted the area already has some signage. Burkart said that some spaces are better left as open space. Swarens noted that the area is inaccessible to many. A motion (Thomas/Kroll) to rank it as N/A with the caveat that it become open space was passed unanimously.

Site 6: The Community Garden in Balboa Park adjoining Russ Blvd. between 24th and 25th streets. The city ranked it as a Low Priority but noted "Expansion appears feasible. The additional recreational value and benefit to the community and the appropriate size of the expanded area would need to be determined. Because this is already park land, discussion centered on infrastructure improvements needed for safety and accessibility. The adjacent historic "grotto" would also benefit from these improvements, Swarens said.

Baldwin said the garden currently has a two- to three-year waiting list, suggesting a need to expand the space and improve the infrastructure. A motion (Baldwin/Strickland) to invest in infrastructure and change the ranking to High Priority was passed by a vote of 9 to 1.

Site 5B: SR-94 from 29th St. to Edgemont St. The city ranked it Low Priority, noting the area "is narrow and constricted and has minimal opportunities." Thomas asked whether the narrow space is intended as a park or a greenbelt. Turgeon noted that a park must be ADA accessible and be used for active or passive recreation. Shields stated it is definitely not a park. As a result of the discussion, Alvarez designated it Low Priority.

Site 5A: SR-94 east of Edgemont St and I-15. The city ranked it N/A and said it was not appropriate for park use because the I-15 section is "narrow, has minimal development opportunity, and is adjacent to industrial uses." Alvarez stated the agreement to rank it N/A.

A motion (Alvarez/Strickland) to retain the city's priorities for Sites 1,3, 4, 5A, 5B, 5C, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 16 passed with 9 in favor, 0 opposed, and 1 abstention.

Site 2: Freeway cap (lid) over the SR-94 to connect Golden Hill with Sherman Heights between 21st and 26th streets along F St. The city ranked it Moderate Priority, stating "This could be an opportunity to create additional park land or park share with other land uses, including creation of a community gateway. Agreement with Caltrans would be required. Potential freeway noise levels and other undetermined environmental issues would need to be addressed. High development costs could make project development prohibitive."

Committee discussion began with Shields asking if the location could be shifted farther east. Swarens pointed out that the 94 route in Golden Hill, unlike farther east, divided communities. Turgeon explained that the ranking was Moderate because of the funding hurdle. Golden Hill received less than \$10 million in development fees over the past 20 years and the cost is substantially more than that. Burkart stated it was important to include the cap in the community plan update to show city officials there was community support for it.

Public comments from five community members stressed the importance of being visionary, noted that it could unify Golden Hill and Sherman Heights, and expressed confidence that funding could be found, perhaps through a bond. Baldwin asked for a statement from a community member Willets in absentia to be read as a public comment as requested by the member. Alvarez and Shields commented that the planning committee is not required to publicly read written statements by community members that have asked. There was disagreement about the role of the planning committee in these instances. The letter from Willets in support of the super deck was not read.

Community member Blair Ward distributed a memo suggesting that maintenance costs could be obtained from a local nonprofit, such as a foundation, a public private partnership, community associations, or through a special assessment district. He also mentioned retail sites atop the deck, the use of volunteers from nearby churches and a school, or an endowment.

A motion (Alvarez, Bugbee) was made to maintain the Moderate Priority ranking. Alvarez pointed out that opinions on both sides, this is not the final change to react to the proposal. Shields noted that assessments would vary by proximity to the site. Burkart said that if this isn't included in the community plan, it won't get attention from elected officials. Turgeon mentioned that the community plan will include all option ranked High or Moderate. The options will go to the City Council in January 2015. The motion was defeated with 3 in favor, 6 opposed, and 1 abstention.

A motion (Swarens, Burkart) to designate the project High Priority passed with 6 in favor and 4 opposed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

