



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: November 10, 2010 REPORT NO. 201

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of November 18, 2010

SUBJECT: Information Item - Draft San Diego River Park Master Plan
and Proposed Community Plan Amendments and
Land Development Code Amendments

SUMMARY

Issue - The purpose of this joint meeting is to update the Park and Recreation Board and the Planning Commission on the status of the Draft San Diego River Park Master Plan (Master Plan), Draft Community Plan Amendments for Mission Valley, Navajo, Tierrasanta, and East Elliot and the Draft Land Development Code Amendments for the Mission Valley Planned District Ordinance (MV PDO), Navajo Community Planned Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ) and the Mission Trails Design District Ordinance and Design Manual (MTDD).

Staff Recommendation -

THIS IS A JOINT INFORMATIONAL MEETING ITEM; NO ACTION IS REQUIRED BY EITHER THE BOARD OR COMMISSION AT THIS TIME.

Community Planning Group Recommendation - The Draft Master Plan, Community Plan Amendments and the Land Development Code Amendments have been presented to the following advisory groups as an information item this year and it is anticipated that the final draft documents will be presented to the same groups in the spring/summer of 2011 as an action item for a recommendation to City Council:

- San Diego River Coalition
- Wetlands Advisory Body
- Community Planners Committee
- Mission Valley Planning Group
- Code Monitoring Team
- Navajo Community Planners, Inc.

- Tierrasanta Community Council
- San Diego River State Conservancy
- Grantville Redevelopment Stakeholders Committee
- Mission Trails Regional Park Citizen's Advisory Committee

Environmental Review - A Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) will be prepared for the Draft Master Plan, Community Plan Amendments and the Land Development Code Amendments. The Notice of Preparation for the PEIR was held on April 20, 2009. The draft PEIR is anticipated to be complete and out for a 45-day public review period in the spring/summer of 2011.

BACKGROUND

The San Diego River, within the City of San Diego, is approximately 17.5 miles long and has a floodway width of 200' to 600'. The river is located in the following planning areas: Mission Bay Park, Mission Valley, Navajo, Tierrasanta and East Elliot. At the western end, the river is located within the Mission Bay Park boundaries and is publically owned. In the Mission Valley Community, the majority of the river is privately-owned except for a few public parcels, including Sefton Field, YMCA and Qualcomm Stadium. Within the Navajo Community, the river is primarily in private ownership, owned by the Federal Government (Admiral Baker Navy Golf Course) or within Mission Trails Regional Park. In the East Elliot Community, the river is privately-owned except at Carlton Oaks Golf Course, where the land is owned by the City and leased to the golf course operator. Development along the river is regulated by the Mission Valley Planned District Ordinance, the Navajo CPIOZ and the Mission Trails Design District Ordinance of the City's Land Development Code (LDC).

Within each of the four community plans (Mission Valley, Navajo, Tierrasanta and East Elliot), the San Diego River is referred to as an amenity, but the development and treatment of the river and the area adjacent to it varies from community to community. The City's General Plan states in the Recreation Element that the San Diego River is a Resource-based Park. Resource-based parks are intended to preserve and make available to all residents and visitors those areas of outstanding scenic, natural or cultural interest. River parks typically involve the coordination and cooperation between federal, state and local resource agencies for the balanced protection of water quality, open space, wildlife, and recreation uses. Resource-based parks are not typically developed to address the specific needs of any one community, but portions of them can and do function to fulfill the local neighborhood and community park needs of surrounding residents.

The Master Plan effort began in the summer of 2001, when then Mayor Dick Murphy invited elected officials from local jurisdictions (county and City of Santee), state and federal governments to be members of a San Diego River Alliance. He worked with and was supported by Council District 6, Council Member Donna Frye, Council District 7, Council Member Jim Madaffer, and Council District 2, Council Member Byron Wear, whose respective districts each include the river.

That same year, citizens concerned about the condition of the river and its surrounding environment formed the San Diego River Park Foundation and the San Diego River Coalition

(Coalition). The Foundation is a 501(C)3 non-profit organization and has a mission to support and empower community groups working to restore and enhance the river and to foster stewardship of this important community and regional asset in perpetuity. The Coalition is a group of citizens representing surrounding communities and special interest groups with a mission to preserve and enhance the San Diego River watershed, and its natural, cultural and recreational resources. The Foundation and Coalition were both invited to be members of the San Diego River Alliance (Alliance). The Alliance then met to work on creating a San Diego River Park that addresses recreational opportunities, cultural resource protection, habitat conservation and restoration, improvement of the water quality, and development interface of the River from its headwaters to the ocean.

Recognizing the importance of the San Diego River as a resource, in 2002, with the assistance of State Assembly member Christine Kehoe, and State Senator Dede Alpert, State Senate Bill 2156 was passed which established a San Diego River Conservancy whose boundaries are the full length of the river including one mile on either side.

In 2002, the San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan was developed by Cal Poly Pomona Studio 606, a landscape architecture graduate program. This plan was prepared for the San Diego River Park Foundation, sponsored by the California Coastal Conservancy and the Select Committee on Park and River Restoration, and chaired by Assembly member Christine Kehoe.

The Conceptual Plan contained four major goals:

1. To Preserve and Celebrate the River's Historic Resources.
2. To Support the Natural Stream Processes of the River.
3. To Preserve and Enhance Native Riparian and Upland Habitat throughout the
4. To Provide Access to Recreation Activities throughout the River Park.

Utilizing the Conceptual Plan as a foundation, the Alliance recommended that local jurisdictions pursue individual River Park planning efforts. The City of San Diego then hired a design consultant to work with the Coalition and community members to produce a Master Plan for the San Diego River Park. In 2005, a draft Master Plan was presented to the City Council as an information item and received wide support. This 2005 draft Master Plan focused on principles that describe the intent and role of the park in the City, key recommendations to make the river a complete hydrologic system, specific recommendations for the different reaches of the river and design guidelines for development of the river area. The Master Plan stated that an essential next step was to determine the right strategy to implement the Master Plan into the City's policy documents and regulations. Several options were identified, including: 1) amend the General Plan; 2) amend the community plans; and 3) apply an overlay zone. Further analysis was needed to determine the proper course of action, which included working with the River Coalition, community planning groups and regulatory agencies. In order to begin the analysis the City Council initiated Community Plan and Zoning Code Amendments study on April 4, 2008. Public workshops were held in 2008 to gather community input on how best to incorporate the Master Plan into the existing community plans and regulations. From that effort the 2005 draft Master Plan was revised into the 2010 version that supported and was consistent with draft amendments to the Mission Valley, Navajo, Tierrasanta and East Elliot Community Plans, and to the Mission Valley PDO, the Navajo

CPIOZ and the Mission Trails Design District Ordinance.

DISCUSSION

The 2010 Master Plan proposes to provide policy direction for the preservation and development of the entire San Diego River within the City's jurisdiction. In the 2010 version, the Master Plan includes a Vision Statement, Principles, Recommendations, Design Guidelines, Implementation Tools and a Regulatory Framework. The vision statement for the Master Plan is to: 'Reclaim the Valley as a Common, a synergy of water, wildlife and people'. This vision statement reflects the reason that a master plan was started in 2001.

The five principles include:

1. Restore and maintain a healthy river system.
2. Unify fragmented lands and habitats.
3. Create a connected continuum, with a sequence of unique places and experiences
4. Reveal the river valley history.
5. Re-orient development toward the river to create value.

General and Specific Recommendations were revised to support the five principles. General recommendations focus on the entire river area and specific recommendations were written for the six reaches of the river. These six reaches are distinguished by hydrologic characteristics and topographic conditions. The reaches include: Estuary, Lower Valley, Confluence, Upper Valley, Gorge and Plateau.

The Design Guidelines were refined to propose two distinct areas of the river; the River Corridor Area and the River Influence Area. The River Corridor Area would include the 100-year Floodway, as mapped by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), plus 35' on either side of the floodway. This area would remain for the most part natural and would contain a multi-use river pathway with some locations for passive recreation such as interpretive overlooks and picnic areas. The River Influence Area would be defined as the first 200' from the River Corridor Area on both sides of the river. It would be in the River Influence Area that most development and re-development would occur. Within these two areas draft design guidelines were written to address site planning, architecture and landscape architecture.

The Design Guidelines Section contains a discussion regarding how the River Corridor Area would be consistent with the City's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan and the City's Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) Regulations of the Land Development Code. The River Corridor Area boundary includes the river's 100 year Floodway and 35' on either side of the floodway. The River Corridor, in many areas along the river, is also mapped with the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) of the MSCP. The MHPA represents a "hard line" preserve, in which boundaries have been specifically determined. It is considered an urban preserve which is constrained by existing or approved development, and is comprised of linkages connecting several large areas of habitat. All development within and adjacent to the MHPA are subject to the MSCP's Land Use Considerations and Land Use Adjacency Guidelines. These MSCP guidelines are implemented through compliance with the MSCP Subarea Plan, ESL Regulations, and the City's Biology Guidelines. In addition, to the mapped MHPA, the River Corridor Area contains wetland habitat and is subject to ESL

Regulations. The ESL Regulations require a wetland buffer to be maintained adjacent to the wetlands as appropriate to protect the functions and values of the existing wetland area. In the Coastal Zone, the wetland buffer is a standard 100' minimum. Outside the Coastal Zone, the buffer is determined by a specific wetland delineation study which involves the evaluation of the site's wetland's function and values. Typically the determination of a wetland buffer requires a consultation with the wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, to agree on the proposed buffer width. The wetland buffer can be the same footprint as the mapped MHPA or in some cases the buffer would be larger than the MHPA. During a project proposal, the River Corridor boundary, the MHPA and the wetland buffer would be required to be mapped. In cases where the MHPA and the wetland buffer overlap the River Corridor Area, the River Corridor Area would expand to provide the river pathway outside of these two areas. In addition, any proposed amenities along the river pathway that do not meet the Land Use Considerations of the MSCP would also be located outside the MHPA and the wetland buffer.

The Implementation Section of the Master Plan was rewritten to focus on how the master plan could be implemented through certain types of funding, development permits and capital improvement projects, and by federal and state permits. Tools to provide maintenance, management and security could include City funds, development permit conditions for maintenance, the creation of special assessment districts, volunteer efforts from the San Diego River Coalition and private donations. These tools could be used in certain areas of the river or provided in a combination when the river park is completed. Ranger programs, neighborhood youth corps programs and 'Adopt the River' programs are discussed as ways to manage the river and provide security. If the City provided maintenance or Ranger programs for the river or sections of the river, then additional City staff would be required.

The last section of the Master Plan discusses the Regulatory Framework for the River. This would include applicable citywide planning policy documents and agency jurisdiction/permits. There are a number of federal, state and local agencies that would also have direct or indirect involvement with the land planning and resource protection for the San Diego River area. Depending on the type of project proposed in the river valley, these agencies would need to be consulted and in some cases permits would be required.

During the study of how to implement the Master Plan with the existing City policy documents and regulations, it was determined through input received at the 2008 public workshops that a new San Diego River Park Overlay Zone would create too many conflicts with the existing overlay zones on the river. Instead, the existing regulations within the Land Development Code (Mission Valley Planned District Ordinance, Navajo Community Planned Implementation Overlay Zone and the Mission Trail Design District Overlay Ordinance) would need to be amended to be consistent with the Draft Master Plan. It should be noted that each of these three existing sections of the Land Development Code already contained language on how development should be provided in and adjacent to the river, but varied from one another and did not provide clear guidance on creating a River Park system and pathway. The proposed amendments would provide consistency and the tools to create the River Park system. The next step was to prepare amendments to the existing community plans; Mission Valley, Navajo, Tierrasanta and East Elliot. Like the regulations, the community plans contained language about development along the river, but were not consistent with each other and did

not look at the river as a river park. The proposed community plan amendments for each of these communities would provide policy guidance on the development along the river; they would be consistent with each other and refer to the San Diego River Park Master Plan as the guiding policy document for the river.

CONCLUSION

The Draft Master Plan is a comprehensive policy document that provides a vision, principles to guide decisions, recommendations to implement the principles, design guidelines for private and public projects and an implementation section on how these could be funded, permitted and maintained. This policy document, along with the amendments to the four community plans and the three sections of the Land Development Code, would reclaim the valley as a common, a synergy of water, wildlife and people.

The final Draft Master Plan, community plans and zoning amendments and the Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) are anticipated to come before the Park and Recreation Board and the Planning Commission in the spring/summer of 2011 for a recommendation to City Council. The primary purpose for this information item is to provide the an update on the status of the San Diego River Park Master Plan and to receive input and support for the overall plan direction as well as identify any other aspects staff should consider as the draft enters the public review phase of the master plan process. All documents can be viewed or downloaded from the City's web site at: www.sandiego.gov/sdriverpark

Respectfully submitted,

William Anderson,
Director
City Planning & Community
Investment Department

Prepared by: Robin Shifflet,
Park Designer
City Planning & Community
Investment Department

(WA/rs)

Attachments:

1. Community Planning Areas Map
2. Mission Valley Community Plan Map
3. Navajo Community Plan Map
4. Tierrasanta Community Plan Map
5. East Elliot Community Plan Map

cc: Council Districts 6 and 7