



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: June 10, 2009

REPORT NO: 101

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of June 18, 2009

SUBJECT: West Lewis Mini Park – Approval of General Development Plan

SUMMARY: Should the Park and Recreation Board approve the proposed General Development Plan (GDP) for West Lewis Mini Park?

Director's Recommendation - Approve the proposed General Development Plan

Other Recommendations – The following groups have reviewed and considered the proposed GDP:

- University Heights Recreation Council
- Design Review Committee
- Uptown Planners – Facilities Subcommittee
- Uptown Planners
- Council District 2 Community “Stakeholders”
- Mission Hills “Heritage” Group

Fiscal Impact – The City’s Capital Improvements Program currently allocates \$450,000 to fund phase one improvements of the West Lewis Mini Park project. It is anticipated that phase one improvements would be primarily in the portion of the park adjacent to West Lewis and Falcon Streets, and include: disabled access improvements, decomposed granite surfacing, decorative hardscape, raised planters, interpretive signage, decorative boulders for seating, landscaping and temporary irrigation. Additional funds will need to be identified and allocated to the project to fully fund the General Development Plan improvements. Annual operation and maintenance cost for the new development is estimated at \$1,800. Funding for these costs will need to be budgeted in the Park and Recreation Department Operating Budget in Fiscal Year 2011, as approved by the Budget Appropriations Ordinance.

Water and Energy Conservation Status - The proposed GDP complies with all water and energy conservation guidelines contained in Council Policy 200-14.

Environmental Status – The City of San Diego, as a lead agency under CEQA, has prepared and completed a Mitigated Negative Declaration, Project No. 150839, dated April 29, 2009, covering the park development activity.

BACKGROUND

The overall project site is approximately 9,900 square feet and is comprised of two canyon overlook areas connected by a pedestrian bridge along a “paper block” of West Lewis Street between Falcon and Goldfinch Streets in the Mission Hills Community Area.

The area identified for phase one construction is located on the southwest corner of West Lewis and Falcon Streets. This property lay fallow for years until it was vacated and quitclaimed to the City for this park as a condition of the adjacent condominium conversion. The proposed improvements include: disabled access improvements, decomposed granite surfacing, decorative hardscape and paving, native landscaping, raised planters, interpretive signage, public art elements, decorative boulders for seating, drainage improvements and irrigation to establish landscaping. The extent of phase one implementation will depend on the bids submitted for the project.

The remainder of the project is located along the unimproved canyon edge of the West Lewis “paper block” from Goldfinch east to the West Lewis and Falcon Street improvements. The proposed future improvements will include a pedestrian bridge to connect the two overlook area improvements, decomposed granite paving, hardscape, raised planters, decorative boulders for seating, landscaping and irrigation to establish landscaping at the southeast corner of West Lewis and Goldfinch Streets.

The preliminary project package was initially submitted to the Development Services Department for evaluation and preparation of an environmental document. At that time, it was determined that the project would require a Process Three Site Development Permit and Mitigated Negative Declaration environmental document. As a part of the Site Development Permit Process, the environmental document and Site Development Permit were sent to the Uptown Planners for review and comment (as discussed under DISCUSSION). The Site Development Permit and mitigated negative declaration were approved by the Hearing Officer on April 29, 2009 (Project Number 150839). Subsequently, an appeal has been filed by Uptown Planners and the appeal hearing is scheduled for the Planning Commission on July 23, 2009. Issues related to the appeal are cited as physical suitability of the site, alteration of natural landforms and land use.

DISCUSSION

- On October 7, 2006, the first project workshop was held at the University Heights Recreation Council (UHRC). This recreation council was selected as it is the neighboring community and there is no recreation council serving the Mission Hills community. This meeting was noticed for a radius of 300 feet around the project site and was listed as a workshop item on the agenda.
- On March 1, 2007, the UHRC unanimously voted to approve the GDP (4 – 0) with the following recommendations:
 - Less trees
 - Orient seating towards canyon
 - Fewer planters
 - Relocate artwork toward street

Eight community members attended the meeting in support of the proposed plan. The recommendations of the UHRC were incorporated into the current proposed GDP.

- On April 11, 2007, the Design Review Committee (DRC) considered the proposed GDP and adopted a unanimous motion to approve the GDP (10 – 0) with the following recommendations:
 - Provide lighting, if possible
 - Remove the on street parking

In review of the recommendations by the DRC, staff determined lighting was in conflict with desires of the community as discussed in the UHRC meeting, and that the project does not have the authority to eliminate on-street parking.

- On March 19, 2009, the Uptown Planners – Public Facilities Subcommittee reviewed the project and made the following motion to recommend to the Uptown Planners:
 - Recommend support for the development of a mini-park at the location; and
 - a) That the design proposed for Phase 1 of the mini-park be significantly revised in order to minimize interference with the canyon and its natural slope by eliminating the proposed grading and instead utilizing the natural canyon edge to set the boundaries for any active use as a park;
 - b) That the concrete portions that transform the natural canyon setting into a plaza be eliminated so that the use of natural canyon lands for recreational purposes is brought into conformity with the stated objectives set out in

the Uptown Community Plan (“Open Space and Recreations Element.”). This means moving the walkable areas farther back from the canyon edge, significantly simplifying the overall design, retaining the interpretative elements, providing a bench, providing a cobble walkway, and providing cobble/rock and native vegetation in place of the poured concrete.

- Eliminate the second phase (those improvements outside the southwest corner of West Lewis and Falcon Streets) of the project, and delete all reference to it in all project-related documents.
 - Uptown Planners recommends that a firm budget not to exceed \$300,000 be established; and that the City of San Diego waive any additional fees.
- On April 7, 2009, Uptown Planners considered the project and approved the same motion as the Public Facilities Subcommittee.
 - On April 29, 2009, the Site Development Permit for the General Development Plan was approved as presented by the Development Services Department Hearing Officer.
 - On May 8, 2009, a group of stakeholders called together by Council District 2, discussed the project and made the following recommendations:
 - Retain the project budget at \$450,000
 - Support the current plan, but substitute certain elements to give a more naturalistic look, including:
 - a) Remove two of the trees in the plan that block the view to the canyon, and replace with lower profile native shrubs, or leave open.
 - b) Possibly reduce the four trees screening the condo development to three trees.
 - c) Substitute decomposed granite for the glass composite tiles in the “plaza” area.
 - d) The preference is for retention of the bird signs and kiosk over having more trees in planters.
 - On May 22, 2009, the Mission Hills Heritage, discussed the project and made the following recommendations:
 - The design should be “softened” and made more organic to fit better within the natural setting of the adjacent canyon.
 - No more than \$450,000 of Developer Impact Fees (DIF) funds should be spent on Phase I of this project, and no DIF funds should be allocated to Phase II of this project.

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- Remove the four northernmost corten steel raised planters with small trees.
- Remove approximately 70-80% of the boulders with only a few left for seating.
- Increase native/drought tolerant plantings as necessary to soften the park.
- Delete the concrete grid.
- Reduce the size of the “accent paver” area and substitute a more organic appearing material.
- Retain the interpretive sign/kiosk and walkway.
- Retain the public art as budget permits.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the proposed GDP for West Lewis Mini Park as presented.
2. Approve the proposed GDP for West Lewis Mini Park with modifications.
3. Reject approval of the proposed GDP for West Lewis Mini Park.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachments: General Development Plan