



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: November 9, 2015

REPORT NO. 102

ATTENTION: Park and Recreation Board
Agenda of November 19, 2015

SUBJECT: Chollas Creek Regional Park Feasibility Study

SUMMARY

Issue – Should the Park and Recreation Board accept the Chollas Creek Regional Park Designation Feasibility Study and recommend updating and expanding the scope of the City-approved Chollas Creek Enhancement Program (2002) to create a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan?

Director's Recommendation – Accept the Chollas Creek Regional Park Designation Feasibility Study and recommend updating and expanding the scope of the City-approved Chollas Creek Enhancement Program (2002) to create as a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan.

Other Recommendations – Not Applicable.

Fiscal Impact – Approximately \$1.3 million in funding is necessary for creation of a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document, technical studies, and processing.

Water and Energy Conservation Status – Not applicable.

Environmental – Initiation of a Master Plan by the Park and Recreation Board is not a “project” pursuant to CEQA Section 15060(c)(2) and as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(c).

BACKGROUND

Chollas Creek traverses the City Heights, Eastern, Encanto Neighborhoods, Southeastern San Diego, and Barrio Logan communities. The creek originates from its headwaters in La Mesa and Lemon Grove and extends through the City to San Diego Bay. In its early history, Chollas Creek

was well known to Native Americans, who used it for settlement and as a major trail through the region. Chollas Creek also has a long geological history evidenced by a number of paleontological sites. In the past 50 years, Chollas Creek has lost some of its natural geographic features due to freeway construction and other urban development that have segmented Chollas Creek so that in some areas it is barely recognizable as an open space system. The historic channel and floodplain of Chollas Creek has been altered substantially as a result of decades of development and human activity. Today, Chollas Creek has little native vegetation, as much of the channel is concrete-lined and contains culverts. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified it as an “impaired” water body due to high levels of cadmium, copper, lead, zinc, and other pollutants found in the channel.

Through the 1970s to the end of the 20th century, community residents developed an interest in Chollas Creek as a result of the City’s community planning program and a growing environmental consciousness. Starting with the Barrio Logan/Harbor 101 Community Plan (1978), the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan (1987) and the Mid-City Communities Plan (1998), issues and visions for Chollas Creek have been discussed and developed. The stated objectives of these plans have been modestly realized.

As part of the Planning Department’s creation of a Chollas Creek Enhancement Program, key issues and design concepts were identified, culminating in a Community Vision (*text taken directly from the Program*) as follows:

Community Vision:

A Linear Park encompassing the multiple branches of Chollas Creek, with possible natural and urban treatments give existing conditions and design/development opportunities. The vision for the Chollas Creek area is multi-faceted including: maintaining the natural areas in an undisturbed fashion, promoting cohesive new development that integrates buildings, open space, and the creek into successful and useable areas for the community, and restoring channeled creeks in urbanized areas to more natural and safe conditions. Finally, the vision creates useable linkages throughout the Chollas Creek and the community to San Diego Bay.

This was the basis of the Chollas Creek Enhancement Program that was approved by City Council in 2002, and the South Branch Implementation Plan in 2003.

Current proposed policies for Chollas Creek within the draft community plan updates for both Southeastern San Diego and Encanto Neighborhoods recommend preparation of a comprehensive study analyzing Chollas Creek’s outstanding, distinctive natural, cultural, or historic resources of a regional nature for consideration of designation as a Regional Park.

Incorporated into the Draft Encanto Neighborhoods Community Plan are recommendations from the Euclid and Market Land Use and Mobility Plan, which identifies three focused improvement areas along Chollas Creek. Both Plans also recommend pocket parks, habitat restoration, and a multi-use trail along the Creek connecting to the surrounding communities.

Several existing and proposed public parks are adjacent to Chollas Creek and include:

- Chollas Community Park
- Chollas Creek Crossing (Water Department and non-profit/volunteer project)
- Chollas Lake Regional Park
- Chollas Radio Canyon Open Space
- Dorothy Petway Neighborhood Park
- Emerald Hills Open Space
- Emerald Hills Park
- Ocean View Mini-Park (future)
- Southcrest Community Park
- Southcrest Trails Park (future)
- Sunshine Berardini Fields
- Valencia Canyon Open Space
- Z Street Mini-Park (future)

Groundwork San Diego (Groundwork) is a non-profit organization that was formed as a recommendation of the Chollas Creek Enhancement Program. Through Groundwork's active participation in projects along the Creek and their participation with planning groups on the identification of Chollas Creek's distinctive natural, cultural, or historic resources a recommendation was added to the Southeastern and Encanto Neighborhood community plan update to look at the feasibility of designating Chollas Creek as a Regional Park.

As a result of the community plan update recommendation, Groundwork brought the issue to the Park and Recreation Board meeting on March 9, 2015, for their consideration and recommendation. The Board, by consent, supported the creation of a Comprehensive Feasibility Study for a Chollas Creek Regional Park designation.

Groundwork, with its consultant Estrada Land Planning, has prepared a Feasibility Study for the creation of Chollas Creek Master Plan and Regional Park designation (see Attachment). The Feasibility Study provides information on a study area, distinctive features, regional benefits, potential impacts to the communities, and implementation.

In addition, Groundwork has presented the Feasibility Study, or provided in an electronic format to the following community planning groups:

- Barrio Logan
- Encanto Neighborhoods
- Greater Golden Hill
- Mid-City/City Heights
- Mid-City/Eastern Area
- Greater North Park

DISCUSSION

The City's General Plan states that "Regional Parks are intended to preserve and make available to all residents and visitors those areas of outstanding scenic, natural, or cultural interests." And further says "Although Regional Parks are not developed to address the specific needs of any one community, portions of them can, and do, function to fulfill the local neighborhood and community parks needs." Existing Regional Parks include but are not limited to Chollas Lake Park, Balboa Park, Mission Trails Regional Park, Otay Valley Regional Park, Presidio Park, and San Diego River Park.

Regional Parks are identified in the City Charter Article V, Section 55.2, (9), which states "San Diego Regional Parks means those parks that serve regional residents and/or visitor populations as determined by ordinance of the City Council." For parks not identified in the City Charter, an ordinance by the City Council is required for Regional Park designation. The Park Planning Section of the Planning Department has developed a process for designation of future regional parks that would require a Park and Recreation Board initiation of a Comprehensive (Feasibility) Study prior to recommendation for Regional Park designation.

Through the review of the Chollas Creek Regional Park – Feasibility Study it appears that Chollas Creek does not meet the typical definition of a regional park, but it has the potential to provide outstanding scenic, natural, and cultural benefits for the communities it is located in. The next step would be to create a Park Master Plan for Chollas Creek that would identify the boundaries of the Regional Park and identify a vision, recommendations, design guidelines, regulatory framework, and an implementation strategy. This could be accomplished by updating and expanding the scope of the City approved Chollas Creek Enhancement Program (2002) to create a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan.

The Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan would also incorporate the recommendations of community plans currently being updated that include Southeastern San Diego, Encanto Neighborhoods, and Golden Hill.

Staff estimates that the Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan would cost approximately \$1.3 million to prepare and would require approximately three years. This effort would entail public meetings, environmental review in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), relevant technical studies, and processing. Funding for this effort is not identified at this time.

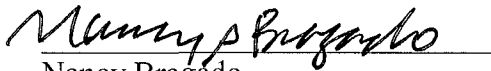
ALTERNATIVES

1. Accept the Chollas Creek Regional Park Designation Feasibility Study and recommend updating and expanding the scope of the City approved Chollas Creek Enhancement Program (2002) to create as a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan.

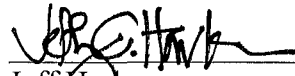
2. Accept the Chollas Creek Regional Park Designation Feasibility Study and recommend updating and expanding the scope of the City approved Chollas Creek Enhancement Program (2002) to create a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan with modifications.

3. Do not accept the Chollas Creek Regional Park Designation Feasibility Study and do not recommend updating and expanding the scope of the City approved Chollas Creek Enhancement Program (2002) to create a Chollas Creek Regional Park Master Plan.

Respectfully submitted,



Nancy Bragado
Deputy Director,
Planning Department



Jeff Harkness
Park Designer
Planning Department

(JH/jh)

Attachment: Chollas Creek Regional Park – Feasibility Study dated September 8, 2015

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