



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: March 9, 2015

REPORT NO. 104

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

SUBJECT: Initiation of a Comprehensive Study for Designation of Chollas Creek as a Regional Park

SUMMARY

Issue – Should the Park and Recreation Board initiate a Comprehensive Study for designation of Chollas Creek as a Regional Park?

Director's Recommendation – Initiate a Comprehensive Study for designation of Chollas Creek as a Regional Park.

Other Recommendations – Not Applicable

Fiscal Impact – Study is being provided by the applicant

Water and Energy Conservation Status – Not applicable.

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

BACKGROUND

Chollas Creek traverses inner city neighborhoods within the Greater Mid-City (City Heights, Eastern), Encanto Neighborhoods, Southeastern San Diego, and Barrio Logan communities, from its headwaters in La Mesa and Lemon Grove 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 freeways 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 and much of the channel is concrete lined and contains culverts. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified it as an “impaired” water body due to high levels of cadmium, copper, lead, zinc, and other toxicity found in the storm water collected.

Through the 1970’s to the end of the 20th century, the inner-city communities developed an interest in Chollas Creek as a result of the City’s Community Planning Program and the environmental consciousness that evolved through the later part of the century. 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.

Starting in 1998, as part of the Planning Department’s creation of a Chollas Creek Enhancement Program, through a public workshop, key issues and design concepts were identified, culminating in a Community Vision (*text taken directly from the Program*) as follows:

Key Issues:

- *The lack of creek identification throughout, and lack of knowledge about its important role in the history of the region and San Diego.*
- *The development of win-win solutions to integrate both open space conservation and urban development opportunities.*
- *The need to realistically address funding for improvements and maintenance of Chollas Creek.*

Design Concepts:

Recreation

- *Need for a multi-use trail system which connect neighborhoods north and south of SR-94, Chollas Lake, Southeastern San Diego, the San Diego Bay, and Mission Valley.*
- *Hiking trails along natural portions of creek and bike pedestrian paths in more developed areas*
- *Focus on youth and education through use of creek*

Development

- *Identify funding sources*
- *Incorporate creek in setting for all development, with Riverwalk type commercial use*

Maintain continuity and connection back to community

- *More bridges to connect communities*
- *Community gardens*

Safety

- *Adequate flood protection*
- *Enhanced personal safety*
- *Solar panel emergency phones*

- *Lighting for pedestrian night use, with motion sensors*

Beautification

- *Emphasize natural setting and encourage wildlife*
- *Use public art*
- *Water wanted all along creek, explore high water table and dredging opportunities*
- *Restore to wetland*
- *Theme of trees to connect creek system visually*
- *No concrete channelization*
- *Cultural history awareness*

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 identify 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 the Chollas Creek and include:

- Southcrest Community Park
- Emerald Hills Park
- Southcrest Trails Park (future)
- Chollas Community Park
- Chollas Lake Regional Park
- "Z" Street Mini-park (future)
- Ocean View Mini-park (future)
- Chollas Radio Canyon Open Space
- Emerald Hills Open Space
- Valencia Canyon Open Space

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."

City Charter Article V, Section 55.2, (9), states "San Diego Regional Parks means those parks that serve regional residents and/or visitor populations as determined by ordinance of the City Council. San Diego Regional Parks shall initially include Chollas Lake Park, Balboa Park, Mission Trails Regional Park, Otay Valley Regional Park, Presidio Park, San Diego River Park,...."

For existing and future parks not indentified 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 Study prior to recommendation for Regional Park designation.

Staff has determined that a Comprehensive Study would need to include the following, with any additional inclusions recommended by the Park and Recreation Board:

- Introduction: Purpose of the study.
- Study Area: Location (boundaries), physical characteristics and surrounding land uses.
- Distinctive Features: Identify and analyze Cultural/Historical, Biological, Geologic and Hydrologic features and provide technical studies of the study area.
- Regional benefits: Identify and analyze the benefit to the region and/or visitor populations.
- Potential Impacts to the communities: Identify potential land use, circulation, biology, geology, historic, hydrology, visual & water quality impacts.
- Implementation: Identify the next steps needed for a Regional Park designation. Identify if a Chollas Creek Park Master Plan needs to be created and if any community plans or the Municipal Code amendments would be required.

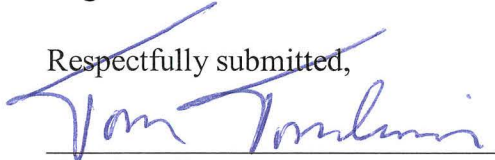
As a result of Groundworks, a non-profit organization that was formed as a recommendation of the Chollas Creek Enhancement Program, active participation in restoration and implementation

of projects along the Creek, participation with planning groups on watershed issues and involvement with the Chollas Creek Watershed Legislators Briefing, and the input from the community during the Draft Community Plan Update process, policies for both Southeastern San Diego and Encanto Neighborhoods, include a recommendation to “Prepare 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.”

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the initiation of a Comprehensive Study for designation of Chollas Creek as a Regional Park.
2. Approve the initiation of a Comprehensive Study for designation of Chollas Creek as a Regional Park with additional inclusions.
3. Do not approve the initiation of a Comprehensive Study for designation of Chollas Creek as a Regional Park.

Respectfully submitted,



Tom Tomlinson
Interim Director,
Planning Department

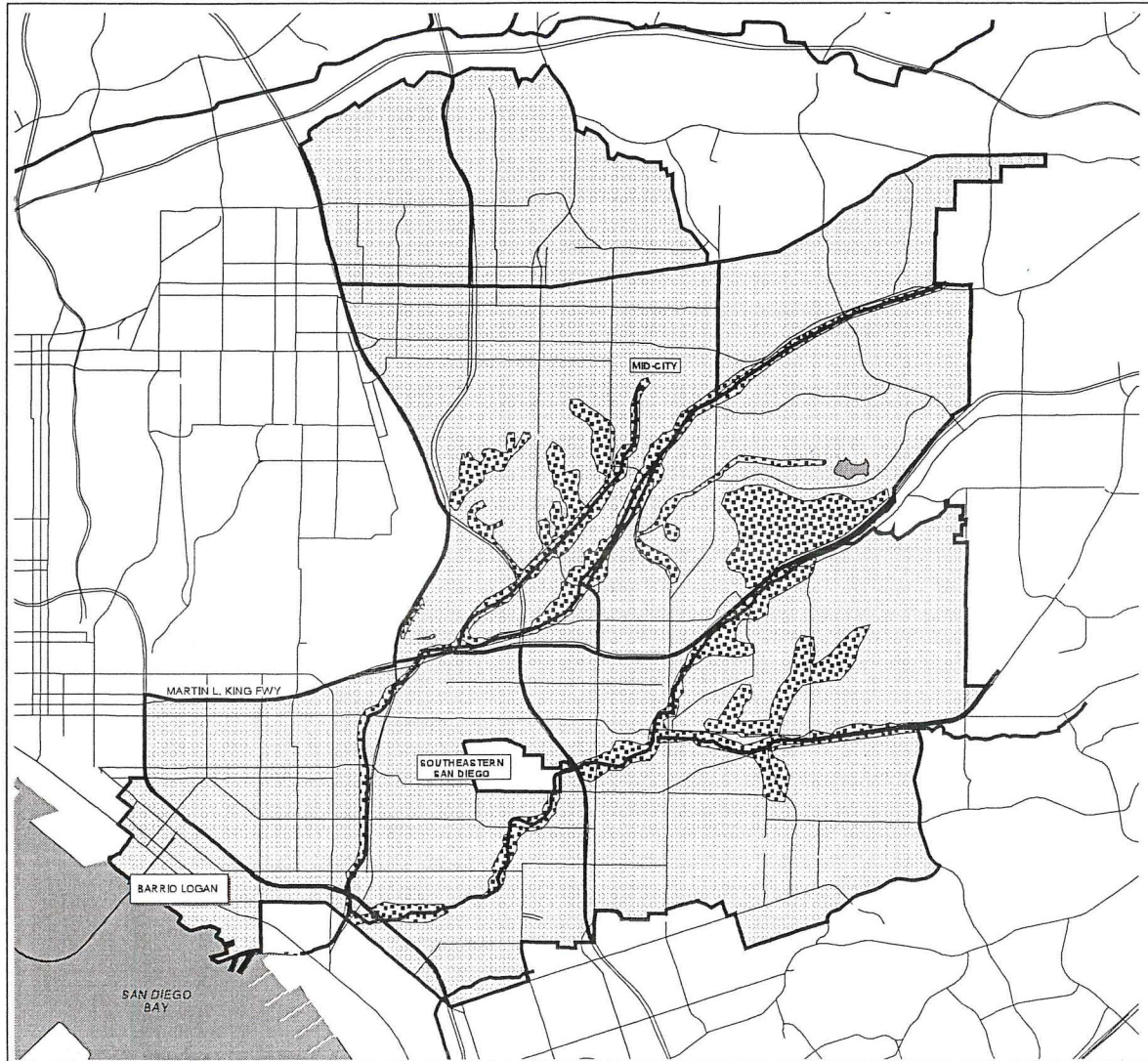


Jeff Harkness
Park Designer
Planning Department

(JH/jh)

- Attachments:
1. Vicinity Map
 2. General Plan – Resource Based Parks
 3. City Charter 55.2(9)

Chollas Creek Community Planning Areas
Mid-City, Southeastern San Diego, Barrio Logan



CHOLLAS CREEK ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

May 14, 2002

Recreation Element

The City's Parks and Open Space System

The City of San Diego provides three use categories of parks and recreation for residents and visitors: population-based, resource-based, and open space. These three categories of recreation, including land, facilities, and programming, constitute the City of San Diego's municipal park and recreation system.

- Population-based parks (commonly known as Neighborhood and Community parks), facilities and services are located in close proximity to residential development and are intended to serve the daily needs of the neighborhood and community.



Hilltop Community Park, Rancho Peñasquitos

When possible, they adjoin schools in order to share facilities, and ideally are within walking distance of the residences within their service area.

- Resource-based parks are located at, or centered on, notable natural or man-made features (beaches, canyons, habitat systems, lakes, historic sites, and cultural facilities) and are intended to serve the citywide population, as well as visitors.
- Open space lands are City-owned lands located throughout the City, consisting of canyons, mesas, and other natural landforms. This open space is intended to preserve and protect native plants and animals, while providing public access and enjoyment by the use of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails.

Parks and open spaces that have been designated in community plans are shown on Figure RE-1 , Community Plan Designated Open Space and Parks Map.

Park and Recreation Challenges

It has become increasingly challenging to meet the public's park and recreational needs as resident and visitor populations grow and the availability of vacant land decreases. The City faces:

- Increased demand on existing/remaining useable park and recreation resources/facilities, especially in older, urbanized communities;
- Increased pressure to develop open space lands and resource-based parks for population-based recreational purposes;
- Inequitable distribution of, and access to, parks citywide, especially in older, developed communities; and
- The need to balance competing land uses, and to recognize the unique differences among communities, in order to achieve livable neighborhoods and communities.

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- (6) *Mission Bay Park Improvement Fund Oversight Committee* means the committee determined by ordinance of the City Council to carry out the oversight responsibilities described herein.
- (7) *Mission Bay Park Lease Revenues* means all revenues collected by the City of San Diego from commercial and non-profit sources within *Mission Bay Park*, including but not limited to all monetary consideration received under leases of city owned property within *Mission Bay Park*, as well as revenue collected from contracts for concessions or any other revenues collected for the use of city owned property within *Mission Bay Park*. The term does not include revenue from the Mission Bay Golf Course, unless privately leased; mooring fees; any revenues from taxes including but not limited to Transient Occupancy Taxes, sales taxes, possessory interest taxes, property taxes; or permit fees such as park and recreation fees or special event fees to the extent those fees are levied to recover actual costs incurred by the City of San Diego.
- (8) *Mission Bay Park Master Plan* means the Master Plan adopted by the City Council for Mission Bay Park in 1994, the Natural Resources Management Plan, and any amendments or updates that are subsequently adopted by the City Council or any such similar replacement plan that may be subsequently adopted by the City Council. For purposes of this Section, the definition shall also include adopted plans for areas located within the *Mission Bay Park Improvement Zone*.
- (9) *San Diego Regional Parks* means those parks that serve regional residents and/or visitor populations as determined by ordinance of the City Council. *San Diego Regional Parks* shall initially include Chollas Lake Park, Balboa Park, Mission Trails Regional Park, Otay River Valley Park, Presidio Park, San Diego River Park, open space parks, and coastal beaches along with coastal parks contiguous thereto. For the purposes of this Section, this definition shall specifically exclude the *Mission Bay Park Improvement Zone*.
- (10) *San Diego Regional Parks Improvement Fund* means a separate interest bearing monetary fund maintained by the City of San Diego to receive and spend the *Mission Bay Park Lease Revenues* identified herein for the benefit of the *San Diego Regional Parks*.