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TITLE:

DRAFT FAIRVIEW PARK MASTER PLAN UPDATE: DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS

DEPARTMENT: **PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

PRESENTED BY: **BRIAN GRUNER, PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR**

CONTACT INFORMATION: **KELLY DALTON, FAIRVIEW PARK ADMINISTRATOR (714) 754-5009**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the City Council:

1. Review and discuss the *Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update* (Attachment 1) prepared by consultant Moore, Iacofano, Goltsman, Inc. (MIG); and

2. Provide direction on the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update for inclusion in the final Fairview Park Master Plan Update for adoption.

BACKGROUND:

City Council Meeting Discussion

On November 18, 2025, staff presented the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update to the City

Council. During the meeting, staff and the consultant team addressed City Council questions regarding various elements of the Master Plan Draft. The meeting had over 40 public speakers providing public comments regarding the Draft Master Plan. After public comments, the City Council unanimously voted to continue the Draft Master Plan item under Old Business at the next regularly scheduled City Council meeting on December 2, 2025.

Master Plan Update

The Draft Master Plan update provides a framework to guide the enhancement, restoration, and management of Fairview Park's unique assets and open recreational space within existing environmental and cultural constraints. The Master Plan also serves as a management tool to inform sustainable park maintenance and operations, recreational activities, educational and interpretive opportunities.

Fairview Park is the City's largest park, spanning 208 acres of open space, which forms an integral component of the lower Santa Ana River ecological corridor. Archeological investigations completed at the Fairview Park site indicate an extensive period of human occupancy at the site dating back over 3500 years. Within the 208 acres of open space, there are two Native American Nationally Registered Historic Sites, and five different habitat ecosystems, which are home to an array of sensitive, rare and endangered plant and animal species. The park also offers users multiple passive recreational opportunities and trails for walking, running, bicycling, and wildlife observation throughout the park's various habitats. The following key factors identify Fairview Park as a cultural, ecological and recreational resource of regional significance.

Cultural and Ecological Resources

- Cultural and historical significance: The park contains nationally registered cultural resource historic sites and is a sacred site to the tribal community.
- Habitat diversity: Fairview Park encompasses several distinct habitat types, including wetlands, riparian areas, coastal sage scrub, coastal bluff scrub, and flower fields. These habitats support a wide array of plant and animal species, many of which are designated as endangered, rare, or special-status wildlife.
- Vernal pools: The park is home to rare vernal pools, which are ephemeral wetlands that provide critical habitat for a variety of unique and specialized organisms, including the San Diego fairy shrimp and Riverside fairy shrimp, both listed as endangered by the federal government.
- Wildlife corridor: Fairview Park serves as a crucial wildlife corridor, connecting the Santa Ana River system of trails and parks to other open spaces in the region, such as Talbert Regional Park.
- Wildlife refuge and human ecology: Fairview Park provides a valuable refuge for wildlife within the urban landscape of coastal Orange County, offering a unique space for people to connect with nature.

Organized Recreational Activities and User Groups

Fairview Park offers approximately seven (7) miles of trails, providing passive recreational opportunities such as walking, running, bicycling, wildlife observation, environmental interpretation,

and connectivity to the Santa Ana River bikeway system. The park also hosts unique organized activities, including the narrow-gauge railroad, hobbyist model glider flying, and community-based restoration and educational activities.

In addition, the following non-profit organizations provide year-round programs and events at Fairview Park:

- Coastal Corridor Alliance (CCA): CCA partners with the City to host community-based restoration events, guided educational tours, volunteering opportunities and other programs to support community stewardship.
- Fairview Park Alliance (FPA): FPA partners with the City to organize volunteer-based restoration activities and educational activities in support of Fairview Park preservation, restoration, and protection.
- Harbor Soaring Society (HSS): HSS is a radio-controlled soaring club, offering model glider flying activities for model aircraft enthusiasts in Fairview Park.
- Institute for Conservation Research and Education (ICRE): ICRE works with schools and educational institutions to conduct student-led research in local natural environments, including Fairview Park.
- Orange County Model Engineers (OCME): OCME operates the narrow-gauge model railroad on the east side of Fairview Park, offering free public train rides through Fairview Park on the model train circuit.
- Sea and Sage Audubon Society: Sea and Sage Audubon conduct organized bird surveys to document bird activity in Fairview Park and offers other programs, including guided educational tours and workshops.

Master Plan Timeline

Over the past 30 years, the City has periodically updated the original Fairview Park Master Plan to comply with new regulatory agency requirements, community requests and ecological findings. Below is a timeline of notable years when the plan was updated and/or impacted by certain events:

- 1996 to 1998: The City of Costa Mesa prepared and adopted the Fairview Park Master Plan (“Master Plan”) to provide a framework for existing and future park improvements, public uses, interpretive elements, and restoration opportunities.

- 2000 and 2002: City Council subsequently adopted revisions to the Master Plan to address specific changes in park features, and in 2008 to account for an updated biological survey of the park.

- 2016: Costa Mesa voters adopted the citizen-initiated Ballot Measure AA, which became codified in the Costa Mesa Municipal Code. Measure AA requires that further development and significant permanent constructed improvements in Fairview Park must be approved by the Costa Mesa electorate prior to being constructed, with certain exceptions for purposes of restoration, public safety, preservation, and maintenance.

- 2017: City Council established the Fairview Park Steering Committee, which is tasked with providing advice and recommendations to the City Council on the implementation of the Fairview Park Master Plan and on Measure AA.

- 2019 to 2020: City Council allocated funding for the Fairview Park Master Plan from the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Budget.
- 2023: The City Council awarded the Professional Services Agreement to MIG for the Fairview Park Master Plan Update.

Master Plan Process

Since March 2023, the consultant team has undergone an intensive process of analyzing a large amount of information about Fairview Park, while evaluating conditions of the site and engaging with the site's diverse stakeholders through the community outreach process.

The key activities completed by the consultant team are:

- Review of historical biological reports, surveys, and other technical reports from the site.
- Conducted botanical investigations to develop a comprehensive list of plant species in the park.
- Review of relevant codes, regulations, and legal information pertaining to the site's biological resources, environmental resources and cultural resources.
    - Evaluated recreational features, public use patterns, furnishings, amenities, and other features.
- Confirmed the presence of over twenty rare and endangered species, including Western burrowing owl, Coastal California gnatcatcher, Least Bell's vireo, Crotch's bumble bee, San Diego Button Celery, Southern tar plant, and several others.
- Prepared and completed three technical reports addressing biological resources, vegetation community mapping and restoration opportunities, and cultural/historical resources assessment.

Outreach and Engagement

The Master Plan update process recognizes the interdependence of meaningful stakeholder engagement. In order to receive community input, staff and the consultant team engaged in the following activities:

- Conducted public outreach sessions, including a combination of community workshops, informational sessions, and presentations to the Parks and Community Services Commission, Fairview Park Steering Committee, and the City Council.
- Consultation with representatives of the Tribal Advisory Group, both in-person at the site and in virtual format.
- Conducted a series of site reviews at various times, seasons, and periods of the day and week to examine use patterns by park visitors throughout the 208-acre site.

The project team synthesized the information gathered during the outreach activities to develop a framework for identifying key findings and recommendations for the Fairview Park Master Plan Update. The consultant team relied on the following criteria in the development of the recommendations for the Master Plan Update:

- Community need and public benefit

- Scientific integrity
- Feasibility
- Sustainability (economic and environmental)
- Legal and regulatory implications
- Consistency with the stated objectives of the Master Plan Update

Fairview Park Steering Committee Recommendations

In July and October 2024, the consultant team presented the Master Plan Update findings and recommendations to the Fairview Park Steering Committee. During these meetings, the Committee discussed, revised and approved 25 recommendations as provided by the consultant from community engagement sessions, Attachment 2. The Committee's general direction was to maintain Fairview Park as a cultural and environmentally sensitive resource. The Committee supports conservation and restoration of native plants, hiking trails and the natural habitat while encouraging community engagement and passive use access.

Special Council Meeting

On January 28, 2025, staff presented to Council a status update on the development of the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan. The overview included key updates on the progress of the community outreach efforts, ecological conditions, a summary of historical documentation and completed restoration efforts, and highlights of resource assessment, technical investigations and field surveys. City Council discussed the Draft Master Plan update and provided feedback to staff, including a balancing of resource protection and public use, which reflects the interest of the community and City.

ANALYSIS:

The Draft Master Plan was developed to reflect the following City Council direction and goals:

1. To restore and preserve the park as an environmental resource and provide interpretive opportunities to educate users of the park's unique ecology, cultural history and resources.
2. To manage the park as a balanced recreational opportunity for all users.
3. To engage stakeholders, users, and the community at large in developing a blueprint to manage the park, which accounts for passive use recreation, environmental restoration and preservation, and funding considerations for years to come.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives of the Draft Master Plan are:

- Incorporate mitigation commitments and new conservation obligations associated with restored areas and conservation easements. (e.g., wetlands and riparian habitat restoration projects, Headlands coastal sage scrub mitigation, vernal pools restoration)
- Reflect the passing of Ballot Measure AA.
- Account for completed improvements, trails, and access features (e.g., North Bluff stairs, Placentia Ave. bridge, Vernal Pool 1 boardwalk)

- Account for resource protection measures based on current regulatory requirements.
- Account for documented species and resources present within the site and produce current biological and cultural resource assessments for the site.
- Carry out tribal consultation in accordance with new State requirements, which require lead agencies to consult with California indigenous tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated with a geographic area of a proposed project.
- Utilize contemporary technology and asset mapping tools to support informed land management.
- Conduct community outreach and engage the local community in planning the future enhancement and improvement of the park.
- Evaluate and account for current and future recreational activities.

Existing Conditions and Regulatory Framework

Fairview Park's biological, cultural, and environmental resources are protected under a comprehensive regulatory and legal framework at federal, state, and local levels, including the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts, National Historic Preservation Act, National and California Registers of Historic Places, California Fish and Game Code, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and Tribal Cultural Resource provisions. These regulations prohibit unauthorized "take" of endangered wildlife resources, and require that projects and activities consider, avoid, or mitigate impacts to significant ecological, historical, and cultural resources. Additionally, local regulations such as Measure AA ensure that major changes to the park's facilities and infrastructure receive community oversight, reinforcing the protection of sensitive natural and cultural areas.

Master Plan Significant Findings and Recommendations

The Master Plan provides a framework for future improvements, enhancements, restoration efforts, and management of the 208-acre site. Significant findings and recommendations in the Master Plan Draft compared to the previous Master Plans are as follows:

- The tribal cultural significance of the Fairview Park site to the tribal community, and the need for continued coordination, site preservation, and relationship building between the City and tribes.
- The need to improve protection of the site's sensitive archeological resources and treat the Fairview Park site as culturally sensitive at a landscape scale rather than as isolated cultural resource sites.
- Discovery of the vernal pool watershed's expansive area, the interconnectedness between the vernal pools and surrounding watershed habitats, and the connectivity of the vernal pool complex on the west side of Fairview Park.
- Improved understanding of the park's biological diversity and ecological sensitivity including several State and Federally listed endangered species found in the park, as well as sensitive habitats which provide habitat for native wildlife.
- The importance of ecologically appropriate maintenance, operations, and management protocols to guide sustainable land management activities around sensitive resources.

- Relocate the fly field from its current location to a non-biological sensitive area of Fairview Park and to avoid environmental impacts to documented resources.
- The importance of maintaining park accessibility to all community members, including incorporation of ADA accessible facilities.
- Recognition of the need for additional public access features such as elevated boardwalks to improve public access and trail connectivity, and to preserve sensitive features.
- Recognition of the need to revegetate areas of excessive barren ground to prevent erosion, improve public safety, and provide users clear definitions for the designated trail system.
- Recognition of the importance of Fairview Park as an exercise hub for community members, and the park's value for physical and mental wellness.
- Recognition of the community's interest in local stewardship activities including volunteering, community-based restoration, and educational tours, and the value of non-profit partnerships in fulfilling this interest.
- Potential for a native plant growing space to supply restoration needs within the park, and to provide other community and educational benefits.
- The scientific value of the site as an open laboratory for scientific research, citizen science, and student learning opportunities in various scientific disciplines (biology, ecology, geology, hydrology, archeology, etc.).
- The educational value of the site for cultural historical storytelling at the site, and opportunities to educate the public about the connectedness between humans and their natural environment.

Community Input on the Draft Master Plan

On October 3, 2025, the City released the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update for a 30-day public review period. Comments received from the public comment period are included in Attachment 3.

The general community feedback themes are:

1. Conservation and education: Community members emphasized the importance of conserving sensitive features and educating the public to protect sensitive biological and cultural resources.

2. Trail management and public access: Participants supported consolidating and maintaining a system of well-defined trails while limiting off-trail use using natural barriers, physical barriers, and clear signage.

3. Resource protection measures: participants expressed strong support for prioritizing sensitive resource protection, including vernal pools and watersheds, sensitive flora and fauna, and cultural sites.

4. Enhanced park operations and amenities: feedback emphasized the need for increased ranger/staff presence onsite, incorporation of ADA-accessible furnishings near the lawn area, additional dog waste receptacles, and improved trails.

5. Opinions of recreational activities: participants had mixed opinions on some recreational activities. While some expressed support for retaining current non-authorized trail use, and the dirt fill mounds used as bike features, others expressed concern over adverse environmental

impacts from these activities. Participants also emphasized safety concerns about BMX activity on the dirt fill features, and concerns with high-speed motorized bike and E-bike activity on trails.

Fairview Park Steering Committee Recommendations
On October 15, 2025, the Committee discussed the previous recommendations and agreed to keep the recommendations as reflected in the Draft Master Plan.

Parks and Community Services Commission Recommendations
On October 30, 2025, the Parks and Community Services Commission held a special meeting to discuss and provide recommendations on the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update. The meeting had approximately 35 public speakers advocating for various initiatives. Some advocated maintaining current programming/activities in their current locations and providing accessibility to all trails, while others focused on an environmentally sensitive approach to conserve Fairview Park.

The Commission's recommendations were the following: include language to adhere to the City's adopted Active Transportation Plan, explore fly field options outside of the park, add multi-language signs, address public safety concerns and encourage the public to participate in tribal coordination and storytelling.

Summary

The Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update represents several years of research and public outreach to develop a blueprint for future enhancements and improvements to Fairview Park. The recommendations in the Draft Master Plan are intended to reflect Fairview Park as a community focused park that encourages community interaction and accessibility while preserving its unique resources. By balancing resource protection and public use and exercising prudent management, Fairview Park can be an accessible ecological and recreational resource to all.

Next Steps
In order to implement the various elements of the Master Plan the following actions need to be completed:

- Staff will finalize the Fairview Park Master Plan Update per City Council direction.
- Consultant will prepare CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) documentation.
- CEQA documentation and draft Final Master Plan will be released for 30 day CEQA review period.
- Staff will return to the City Council for adoption of the Final Fairview Park Master Plan Update.

ALTERNATIVES:

The City Council may provide direction to staff to incorporate other recommendations and/or pursue other alternatives.

FISCAL REVIEW:

Funding for the Fairview Park Master Plan Update is available in the Park Development Fees Fund (Fund 208).

LEGAL REVIEW:

There is no legal review required for this item as the direction will be advisory in nature.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND PRIORITIES:

This item supports the following City Council Goals:

- Strengthen the Public's Safety and Improve the Quality of Life.
- Maintain and enhance the City's facilities, infrastructure, and technology.
- Advance environmental sustainability and climate resiliency.

CONCLUSION:

Staff recommends the City Council:

1. Review and discuss Attachment 1 - *Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update* prepared by consultant Moore, Iacofano, Goltsman, Inc. (MIG) and;

2. Provide direction on the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update for inclusion in the final Fairview Park Master Plan Update for adoption.