



CITY OF COSTA MESA

77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Agenda Report

File #: 25-152

Meeting Date: 1/28/2025

TITLE:

FAIRVIEW PARK MASTER PLAN UPDATE DISCUSSION - PART ONE

DEPARTMENT: PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

PRESENTED BY: BRIAN GRUNER, PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
DIRECTOR

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RECOMMENDATION:

Staff Recommends the City Council receive and file the staff presentation on the status of the Fairview Park Master Plan Update and provide feedback.

Due to the breadth and volume of information involved with the Fairview Park site and the various technical reports entailed in the Fairview Park Master Plan Update project, the City Council study session presentations on the project will occur in two (2) parts. In part one, the project team will provide an overview on the status of the update overview, including:

- Community outreach.
- Current ecological conditions.
- Summary of historical documentation and completed restoration efforts.
- Highlights of resource assessments, technical investigations and field surveys.

In part two, the project team will present the Master Plan Update Findings and Recommendations for the Draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update.

BACKGROUND:

Fairview Park Site Overview

Fairview Park is the City's largest park, hosting 195 acres of open space area and 13 acres of developed parkland for a total of 208 acres. Within the 195 acres of open space there are two (2) Native American Nationally Registered Historic Sites, and five different habitat ecosystems which are home to a wide array of sensitive, rare and endangered plant and animal species including Burrowing owl, California gnatcatcher, least Bell's vireo, Crotch's bumble bee, San Diego button celery, Orcutt's grass, and various others. The park also offers users multiple passive recreational opportunities including several miles of trails for walking, running, bicycling, wildlife observation, and environmental

interpretation throughout the park's different ecosystems. The City also maintains several partnerships with non-profit organizations that support programming and activities in Fairview Park.

Several key factors establish Fairview Park as an ecological resource of regional significance:

- **Habitat diversity:** 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:** Home to 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:** Serves as a crucial wildlife corridor, connecting the Santa Ana River system of trails and parks to other open spaces in the region, including Talbert Regional Park, the Randall Preserve, and the Huntington Beach Wetlands. This connectivity facilitates the movement of species between habitats and promotes genetic diversity, which is essential to the continued survival of wildlife populations fragmented by urban development.
- **Cultural and historical significance:** Contains two nationally registered cultural resource historic sites, highlighting the area's rich human history.
- **Wildlife refuge and human ecology:** Provides a valuable refuge for wildlife amidst the urban landscape and offers a unique space for people to connect with nature and learn about the importance of preserving biodiversity for local, regional and global sustainability.

Master Plan Background

Between 1996 and 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, and restoration opportunities in the park. The City Council subsequently adopted revisions to the Master Plan in 2001 and 2002 to address specific changes in park features, and in 2008 to account for an updated biological survey of the park. Since that time, the City has initiated and completed a number of significant projects and restoration efforts within the park, documented a variety of special-status plant and animal species, and introduced educational programs to engage and educate park visitors about the park's unique environmental features.

Changes Impacting the Park

Since the 1998 adoption and subsequent 2008 Master Plan update, several significant changes have occurred in Fairview Park. A few highlights include:

- Construction of the 35-acre wetlands and riparian habitat restoration project.
- Construction of the vernal pool 1 boardwalk.
- Construction of the northwest staircase.
- Headlands Mitigation Coastal Sage Scrub Restoration

- Restoration of the vernal pool 5-7 watershed complex (ongoing).
- Incorporation of community-based restoration efforts with partner organizations and community volunteers.
- Restoration of the Fairview Park canyon (ongoing)
- Documentation of various special-status wildlife species within the site.
- Legal and regulatory updates for biological and cultural resources protection.
- Adoption of citizen-led ballot Measure AA restricting voter approval for new permanent constructed improvements in Fairview Park, with limited exceptions for restoration, preservation, maintenance, and public safety purposes.

Due to the site's habitat values and geographic connectivity with open spaces along the lower Santa Ana River ecological corridor, the site of Fairview Park has historically been a strong candidate for conservation grants and environmental mitigation agreements with outside entities. Since 1996, the City has completed over 50 acres of successful habitat restoration of multiple vegetation communities including vernal pools, coastal sage scrub, grasslands, wetlands, woodlands and other habitats. These projects have accomplished significant improvements to the environmental quality of the site for community residents and restored and enhanced wildlife habitat for a wide variety of native plant and animal species. Current and ongoing restoration projects include:

- Vernal Pools 5, 6, and 7 and Associated Watershed Restoration
- Upper Canyon Restoration
- Wetlands and Riparian Habitat Phase II (OCTA project)
- Mesa Restoration Coastal Sage Scrub and Flower Fields Restoration (design complete, implementation pending contract award)

Need for a Master Plan Update

Since the adoption of the original Master Plan in 1998, the City has not completed a comprehensive update to the Master Plan to account for 25+ years of the park's evolution and major developments in the environmental and regulatory landscape. During this time, various scientific and regulatory updates have occurred, including new legal protections for multiple species of wildlife that are present in Fairview Park. In addition, significant advancements have emerged in the realm of geospatial technology, remote sensing, and asset management. By integrating these contemporary tools into a Master Plan Update project, an updated Fairview Park Master Plan will allow the City to effectively and adaptively manage Fairview Park's diverse capital assets and environmental resources over time.

Due to the age of the Master Plan, technological and scientific advancements, and the significant changes that have occurred which affect the land management of Fairview Park, the City Council allocated funding in the City's 2019-2020 Capital Improvement Program Budget for the Fairview Park Master Plan Update.

ANALYSIS:

In January 2023, the City Council awarded the Professional Services Agreement to Moore, Iacofano, and Goltsman (MIG), Inc. for the Fairview Park Master Plan Update. Since that time, MIG's multidisciplinary team of subject matter experts has been working with the City to complete the project tasks. For reference, the primary tasks include:

Task 1: Historical Summary and Review of Existing Documentation

Task 2: Community Outreach and Tribal Advisory Group Consultation

Task 3: Resource Assessment and Analysis of Existing Conditions (including Operations, Maintenance, and Management Plan)

Task 4: Master Plan Update Findings and Recommendations

Task 5: Environmental Compliance Documentation

Community Engagement

MIG, in coordination with City staff, conducted community outreach with the site's diverse stakeholders. Community outreach included a combination of community workshops, informational sessions, and presentations to the Parks and Community Services Commission and Fairview Park Steering Committee over the last 24 months. The Fairview Park community engagement events occurred via the following:

- Master Plan Community Workshops
 - August 31, 2023
 - November 8, 2023
 - September 4, 2024
- Two monthly volunteer restoration days
 - 2nd Saturday of the month restoration is hosted by Fairview Park Alliance
 - 3rd Saturday of the month restoration is hosted by Coastal Corridor Alliance
- Community Events (booth and staff provide information to attendees)
 - Love Costa Mesa Day
 - Concerts in the Park (4 concerts)
 - Earth Day
- Fairview Park Steering Committee Meetings (Publicly noticed and promoted via e-mail, newsletter, and social media)
 - Meeting occurs every other month on the 2nd Wednesday of the month (Even month dates)

Status of Master Plan Update

In the last 24 months, MIG has gone through an intensive process of reviewing and analyzing a large volume of information about Fairview Park. This has included evaluating existing conditions and uses of the site. Some highlights of activities completed by the consultant team include:

- Monitored public use patterns and conducted informal outreach during weekend activities at Fairview Park with local partner organizations.
- Conducted site reviews and walks at various times, seasons, and periods of the day and week to examine use patterns by park visitors throughout the site.
- Conducted wildlife investigations of the site by expert biologists.
- Reviewed historical resource inventory and cultural resources reports.
- Consultation with representatives of the Tribal Advisory Group both in-person at the site and in virtual format.
- Confirmed biological findings of over twenty rare and endangered species including Burrowing owl, California gnatcatcher, least Bell's vireo, Crotch's bumble bee, San Diego Button Celery, Orcutt's grass, and various others.
- Conducted botanical investigations to develop a comprehensive list of plant species in the park, and to search communities and the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) for the presence of special-status species in the site.
- Reviewed historical biological reports, surveys, and other technical reports from the site.

Next Steps

Utilizing the information gathered during the tasks identified above and community engagement with the site's diverse stakeholders, the project team is developing a framework for evaluating community needs and stewardship opportunities for the draft Fairview Park Master Plan Update. This framework will be further described in the part 2 presentation on the project, in addition to the draft Master Plan Update Findings and Recommendations.

The City will continue current park activities and operations until the Master Plan Update draft is completed and presented before the City Council. The current HSS Use Agreement with the City authorizes the City Manager to continue current activities until the Master Plan Update draft is presented or until May 31, 2025, whichever comes sooner.

As one of the last remaining land parcels in the region to persist in a mostly natural and undeveloped state, Fairview Park is a critical environmental resource to a wide variety of native flora and fauna that has been broadly lost to urban development. Similarly, the site's extensive archeological record and deep significance to the Indigenous community highlight the importance of protecting and preserving Fairview Park's rich historical legacy. Fairview Park is also a treasured recreational resource for the community. To this end, the City's stewardship of Fairview Park requires deliberate planning to achieve a sustainable balance between the unique environmental resources and public uses of the land.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is an informational item only.

FISCAL REVIEW:

This item is informational in nature and has no impact to the City's budget.

LEGAL REVIEW:

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed this report as to form.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND PRIORITIES:

This item supports the following City Council Goal:

- Advance Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resiliency

CONCLUSION:

This is an informational item regarding the Fairview Park Master Plan Update. Staff recommends that the City Council receive and file this report and provide feedback.