

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: June 6, 2011

Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan update:
a) Work Session with the Parks & Recreation Commission
b) Unfinished business item on execution of a contract with Cheryl Miller and Associates for updating the long-term vegetation management plan for Albany Hill

REPORT BY: Penelope Leach, Recreation and Community Services Director

a) Work Session with the Parks & Recreation Commission

At the May 2, 2011 Council meeting, Council requested a work session with the Parks and Recreation Commission to better understand the vegetation management challenges on Albany Hill and further discuss the scope of the master plan update before taking action on awarding a contract for services to update and refine the Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan.

Attached is the map requested by the City Council delineating public and private ownership and easements. Fire, engineering, and public works management will be present to serve as resources during the work session.

Below is the staff report for the action item on the contract for services.

b) Unfinished business item on execution of a contract with Cheryl Miller and Associates for updating the long-term vegetation management plan for Albany Hill

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

That Council authorize the City Manager to execute a contract with Cheryl Miller and Associates for updating the long-term vegetation management plan for Albany Hill.

BACKGROUND

The Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan was developed 20 years ago and although many of the elements in the plan are still valid and useful today, in September 2010 staff recommended updating at least portions of the plan to better direct staff in prioritizing resources and to answer the question, “What does the community want Albany Hill to look like in 20 years.” Vegetation/fuel management, land acquisition, access, and the vast number of Eucalyptus trees are the areas that need to be addressed and updated.

Council approved up to \$50,000 to update the Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan so that a consultant(s) could be hired to work with the community, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and staff to update the Plan. Funds from Measure R Open Space were approved the master plan update.

At the March 2011 meeting the Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed and edited the Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit consultants to assist in developing and writing the vegetation management portion of the updated Plan. The deadline for submissions was April 8, 2011. Staff sent the RFP to five potential candidates/agencies. Two RFP’s were returned. One of the two returned submitted a proposal that exceeded the approved budget.

The Commission recommended contracting with Cheryl Miller and Associates for updating the long-term vegetation management plan for Albany Hill. When the City Council reviewed this recommendation at the meeting of May 2, 2011, the Council asked that a work session be scheduled with the Commission to discuss the current conditions and work proposal.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

There are several benefits to updating the 1991 vegetation management plan;

1. When the 1991 plan was written, Albany did not have an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Policy. In 2008 Council approved the City’s IPM Policy and the policy is a critical part of making decisions as to how to manage vegetation on Albany Hill.
2. CEQA requirements have changed in the last 20 years and the City needs assurance that any kind of vegetation removal does not comprise CEQA mandates including sensitive habitat and protected species.
3. Currently the City has an annual budget of \$10,000 for vegetation management for Albany Hill which has proven to be too little to keep up with fire prevention measures, non-native plant control such as French broom, eradicating poison oak, dealing with aging Eucalyptus as well as Eucalyptus saplings, etc. Having a clear plan that will assign yearly tasks with cost will allow staff to put together a annual

budget that will not only help the City catch up with deferred maintenance, but begin maintaining vegetation at a standard that the updated plan will help establish.

4. There are varying opinions within the community as to what projects need to be funded first as well as what needs to be done to control vegetation. For instance, what to do with the many Eucalyptus trees continues to be an unanswered question. Additionally, there are varying opinions regarding other non-natives like French broom and how best to care for the creek that borders Albany and Richmond/El Cerrito. A third party consultant with expertise in these areas, as well as facilitation skills, will allow for a community vetting process that can sort out the issues and work towards consensus.
5. The City has purchased open space over the last 20 years with Measure R funds and with those purchases comes a responsibility to maintain the land. Vegetation management is an eligible use of Measure R funds and by having an updated plan with updated costs; the City will have current information available to aid in the discussion of whether or not the City should purchase additional parcels or easements in the near future.
6. An updated plan can help leverage other funds such as grants from the California Fire Safe Council Clearinghouse and Pre-disaster Hazard Mitigation grants from FEMA.
7. Currently the vegetation management funds are spent on similar annual fire prevention tasks to manage each year's new growth. The planning process can determine if it is feasible and preferable to do more costly treatments that are effective for multiple years or continue with treatments that are less expensive but required every year. For example procuring grant funds for a targeted control of an area of French broom or eucalyptus in conjunction with expansion of the native bunch grasses or oak-woodland.
8. By having a road map that identifies projects that need to be completed each year, staff can better identify needed new activities or follow-up actions, direct volunteer projects, as well as insure that the incremental projects completed by any group, volunteer or paid staff, are the best use of funds as will help reach the overall goals. The consultant will be working with the community and the Parks and Recreation Commission to help identify short-term and long-term goals.

The request for updating the 1991 plan came with an understanding that Council would also approved Measure R funds to implement the plan. The recommendations from the 1991 plan remain largely unaccomplished. Community concern that a new plan will be a repeat of the 1991 plan and the funds spent on a consultant could be a waste of money, have a valid concern. It is the hope of staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission that by approving the contract with Cheryl Miller and Associates, the Council is also committed to implementing the updated plan.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

The recommended consultant will assist in writing the vegetation which will give the City a long-term plan that will emphasize fire prevention, removal of invasive/non-native plants, and protection of sensitive habitat.

FISCAL IMPACT

City Council approved up to \$50,000 for the updated plan. The recommended consultant submitted a proposal for \$49,950 which includes a \$2,250 contingency.

Attachments

1. Map of Albany Hill
2. Proposal for Development of Albany Hill Vegetation Management Plan to be included in the Albany Hill Creekside Masterplan
3. 1991 Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan