



AGENDA BILL

Agenda Item No. 6(A)

Date: December 15, 2015
To: El Cerrito City Council
From: Melanie Mintz, Community Development Director
Subject: Adopt Urban Greening Plan and Approve Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

ACTION REQUESTED

Conduct a public hearing and upon conclusion, adopt a resolution approving the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and adopting the City of El Cerrito Urban Greening Plan including Addendums #1 and Addendum #2.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the City was awarded \$239,498 from the State of California's Urban Greening Planning for Sustainable Communities Grant program (Proposition 84) for the preparation of a citywide Urban Greening Plan ("Plan"). The application for grant funds was recommended by the Environmental Quality Committee (April 12, 2011) and the Parks and Recreation Commission (April 26, 2011) and approved by the City Council by Resolution No. 2011-38 on June 6, 2011. Development and implementation of urban greening plans support the State's environmental goals and planning policies; promote infill development and equity; protect the environment; and encourage efficient development patterns.

For the City, the Plan was undertaken to continue and coordinate the City's ongoing efforts to improve quality of life for current and future residents by identifying strategies to enhance the City's public places and open spaces. The Plan identifies needs, opportunities and strategies for creating a greener, more sustainable and livable City through increasing connectivity; creating day-to-day opportunities to gather, play and enjoy; improving existing parks and green spaces; and identifying new ways to meet the community's need for different types of open spaces given limited resources. The Plan builds upon and synthesizes previous and current planning efforts, builds upon past projects, and helps institutionalize existing practices.

The Plan was developed through an extensive community engagement process that included community workshops; ongoing input from the Urban Greening Task Force, convened for this planning effort; a community survey which received 848 responses over a 6-week period; focus group meetings; consultation with the Tree Committee on the Plant Palette (Appendix C of the Plan) and ongoing, in depth communication and coordination with representatives of City departments. A summary of the Community Engagement process is provided in Appendix A to the Plan.

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After extensive public review, comments and revision, the Plan was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission and Environmental Quality Committee. Staff sought recommendations for City Council adoption at the June 24, 2015 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting and the June 30, 2015 Environmental Quality Committee meeting. With recommendations from both advisory bodies in hand, an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) was prepared, released on October 7, 2015 and circulated for 30-days pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). No public or agency comments were received on the CEQA document, and a Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) was developed. The Plan, IS/MND and MMRP were brought to the Planning Commission for its review on November 18, 2015. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the three documents (PC15-12) and submission of the documents to the City Council with slight modifications, as summarized in Attachment 3, Addendum #1.

The Tree Committee also submitted substantial comments on the Plant Palette that were incorporated into Appendix C of the document. Additional Plant Palette changes, not yet incorporated in the draft document have been provided as Attachment 4, Addendum #2.

For ease of review, the Executive Summary is included as Attachment 5 to this staff report.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no immediate costs associated with the recommended action. Implementation of the Plan will require resources that will be identified and appropriated as needed. The Plan will help the City leverage outside resources for ongoing urban greening efforts.

STRATEGIC PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Adoption of the Urban Greening Plan will help to fulfill the following City of El Cerrito Strategic Plan goals:

- Deepen a sense of place and community identity;
- Develop and rehabilitate public facilities as community focal points;
- Ensure the public's health and safety;
- And, foster environmental sustainability citywide.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The City Attorney has reviewed the Urban Greening Plan, the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and the proposed action and there are no legal issues.

Reviewed by:



Scott Hanin, City Manager

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Urban Greening Plan and Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration
3. Addendum #1 (Planning Commission Revisions)
4. Addendum #2 (Additional Tree Committee Comments)
5. Urban Greening Plan Executive Summary

RESOLUTION 2015-XX

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EL CERRITO APPROVING THE INITIAL STUDY/MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION AND MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM FOR AND ADOPTING THE URBAN GREENING PLAN, INCLUDING ADDENDUM #1 AND ADDENDUM #2

WHEREAS, the City applied for and was awarded an Urban Greening Planning grant from the State of California's Urban Greening for Sustainable Communities Grant Program (Proposition 84) from the State of California Strategic Growth Council (Resolution 2011-38); and

WHEREAS, preparation of a citywide Urban Greening Plan was recommended by the Environmental Quality Committee on April 12, 2011 and Parks and Recreation Commission on April 26, 2011; and

WHEREAS, preparation of the Urban Greening Plan was undertaken to continue and coordinate the City's ongoing efforts to improve quality of life for current and future residents by identifying strategies to enhance the City's public places and open spaces; and

WHEREAS, the Urban Greening Plan was developed through extensive community engagement through workshops, input from the Urban Greening Task Force, a community survey, focus group meetings, consultation with the Tree Committee and interdepartmental communication and coordination, as documented in the Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Plan was reviewed and recommended for adoption at the June 24, 2015 Parks and Recreation Commission and June 30, 2015 Environmental Quality Committee meetings; and

WHEREAS, an Initial Study/Negative Declaration (IS/MND) was prepared and circulated beginning October 7, 2015 for 30-days pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and

WHEREAS, no comments were received on the IS/MND and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) was developed; and

WHEREAS, the Urban Greening Plan, IS/MND and MMRP was brought to the Planning Commission for its review on November 18, 2015; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission recommended adoption of the Plan, with slight modifications as presented in Addendum #1 and approval of the IS/MND and MMRP (PC15-12); and

WHEREAS, additional modifications to the Plant Palette were made to incorporate Tree Committee comments as presented in Addendum #2; and

WHEREAS, on December 15, 2015, the City Council held a properly noticed public hearing at which it heard public comments and considered those comments and the staff report, which described and analyzed the Urban Greening Plan (Exhibit 1) and IS/MND and MMRP (Exhibit 2) and are hereby incorporated by reference. The IS/MND and MMRP consist reflect the City's independent judgment and analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the Plan. The custodian of the documents and other

materials that constitute the record of proceedings for the Urban Greening Plan is the City of El Cerrito Community Development Department, 10890 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530-2323.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of El Cerrito that the foregoing recitals are true and correct and made a part of this Resolution.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Council hereby finds that there is no substantial evidence in light of the whole record before the City that the Urban Greening Plan, as mitigated, will have a significant effect on the environment, and that the IS/MND reflects the City's independent judgment and analysis as to the potential environmental effects of the Urban Greening Plan.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Council hereby approves the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and the City of El Cerrito Urban Greening Plan, including Addendum #1 and Addendum #2.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall become effective immediately upon passage and adoption.

I CERTIFY that at a regular meeting on December 15, 2015 the City Council of the City of El Cerrito passed this Resolution by the following vote:

AYES: COUNCILMEMBERS:
NOES: COUNCILMEMBERS:
ABSENT: COUNCILMEMBERS:

IN WITNESS of this action, I sign this document and affix the corporate seal of the City of El Cerrito on December XX, 2015.

Cheryl Morse, City Clerk

APPROVED:

Greg Lyman, Mayor



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The proposed Urban Greening Plan (including appendices) and Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (including Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program) is available for review at:

<http://www.el-cerrito.org/urbangreening>,

and at the El Cerrito Library, 6510 Stockton Avenue and El Cerrito City Hall, 10890 San Pablo Avenue, during normal working hours.

Addendum #1 (to Final Draft: Urban Greening Plan. November 17, 2015)

(Incorporating Comments from November 18, Planning Commission meeting)

Comment: Emphasize need for additional tot lots/play areas closer to San Pablo Avenue and near multifamily housing.

Response: Add *italics* below to Objective 6: Resilient Higher Density Neighborhoods (p. 70):

“...Emphasize the need for strategic open spaces in higher density neighborhoods to provide multifamily housing residents with *additional tot lots, playgrounds and other* active recreation, urban agriculture, and community gathering opportunities...”

6.2: Second bullet point:

“...Evaluate open space access in high density neighborhoods on a regular basis to ensure residents have easy access to a range of parks and open spaces, including community gardens, *tot lots*, gathering spaces, and natural landscapes. Explore opportunities for land acquisition through the in-lieu program, *condition of approval process*, or other mechanisms where a need is identified.”

Comment: In planting of public trees, consider appropriate placement to unnecessarily block view corridors from public open spaces.

Response: Add *italics* below to Objective 4: Enhanced Existing Parks (p. 62-3)

4.2: First bullet point:

“Develop design guidelines and environmental criteria to streamline project design review. These design guidelines should consider broad community priorities, such as active and passive recreation and environmental services, *and design review details including the relationship between tree selection, site planning, and the protection or enhancement of existing natural assets such as view corridors.*”

Comment: The Planning Commission asked to consider Alternative 2 of the Lower Fairmount Avenue Focus Area as the preferred alternative (p. 120-121.)

Response: p. 120, paragraph 2: Change “The first alternative” to “One alternative”.

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p. 121, Cost Estimate: Add Note: Final design would be determined through a complete public engagement, design and engineering process and environmental analysis.

Comment: Add development of wildlife corridors to Plan.

Response: Add *italics* below to Objective 7: Enriched Natural Areas (p. 72) and Objective 8: Enhanced Creeks (p. 75)

7.1: Second bullet point:

“Consider strategic land acquisition where needed to preserve environmental benefits and establish or expand wildlife corridors.”

8.3: Second bullet point:

“...Develop guidelines that support existing and enhance wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors.”

Addendum #2 (to Final Draft: Urban Greening Plan. November 17, 2015)

(Incorporating Comments from Tree Committee)

1. Comment: Delete *Quercus englemannii* and *Tilia tomentosa* from Large Trees list.
Response: Will delete these species from the Large Trees list.

2. Comment: Tree characteristic columns- populate fully for the following species which are all suitable street trees - indicate as such.
 - Aesculus carnea
 - Gleditsia triacanthos inermis
 - Quercus ilex
 - Quercus rubra
 - Ulmus hybrids
 - Cercis canadensis var. texensis 'Oklahoma' (misspelled in UGP)
 - Laurus nobilis 'Saratoga'
 - Tristaniopsis laurinaResponse: will populate tree characteristic columns

3. Comment: Understory and Small trees - add introduction (see TC comment Page 3 item 4)
Response: will add introduction as follows - "Very small to medium trees are 10-50 feet tall. One of the key uses of small trees in urban forestry is for planting under utility wires. Utility friendly trees, as defined by PG&E, are 25 feet tall or less."

4. Comment: Remove fruit trees from Understory and Small Trees table and create a separate table from small tree per TC request
Response: Will create new list of trees solely for fruit trees.

4. Comment: Commercial Streets- Remove the following species and remove photos Figure 03, 04, 05, 10
 - Acer macrophyllum
 - Alnus rhombifolia
 - Platanus racemosa
 - Tilia tomentosa
 - Heteromeles arbutifolia
 - Prunus ilicifolia (misspelled in UGP)
 - Pyrus calleryana 'Aristocrat' (also misspelled in UGP)
 - Sambucus MexicanaResponse: Will remove the specified photos and species.

5. Comment: Creek "Interpretation" ... edit to Creek "Restoration and Natural Areas"
Response: Will edit title accordingly

6. Comment: Edit Figure 11 caption "White Alder are an excellent native riparian tree" remove "excellent street choice"
Response: Will edit caption

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7. Comment: Remove “Appropriate for streetside plantings” or remove the following species from this asterisk category

- Aesculus californica
- Alnus rubra (remove from UGP)
- Arbutus menziesii
- Calocedrus decurrens (not a riparian tree)
- Salix spp.
- Prunus ilicifolia (misspelled in UGP)
- Mahonia spp. (an armed plant not suitable for streets)
- Rosa californica (very aggressive, armed plant that should be contained in an urban setting)
- Rubus ursinus (aggressive plant not suitable for street use)

Response: will remove “Appropriate for streetside planting” in the table notes.

8. Comment: Biofiltration – Please read and incorporate the TC Comments (see Page 4 item 7)

Response: Will delete species list for this section and will include text referring to the Contra Costa County Clean Water Program C.3 Guidebook 6th (or current) Edition to pick out an appropriate plant palette for biofiltration purposes.

9. Comment: delete species list from Pollinators section

Response: will delete species list, and will cite appropriate source to develop plant palette

10. Comment: All references to city documents (ordinances, other planning documents, etc.) should be hyperlinked, at least in a reference section to the document, if not throughout. This should be standard operation procedure for City documents.

Response: Working on a method of doing this smoothly.

11. Comment: The General Plan calls for a Tree Preservation Ordinance and an Open Space Preservation Program (Chapter 7, Part C - Goal and Policies). These should be reiterated in the Urban Greening Plan.

Response: Will mention the Tree Preservation Ordinance and Open Space Preservation Program throughout text, where appropriate.

12. Comment: Funding/HNA: Funding for tree and fuel maintenance in Hillside Natural Area should be independent of the street tree budget, so that the goals of both programs are achieved.

Response: Will clarify funding sources in document, where appropriate.

13. Comment: The City Arborist should be engaged on any project involving El Cerrito’s urban forest. The Design Review Board should coordinate with or solicit input from Tree Committee when public trees or trees in public open spaces are involved in any project.

Response: Noted.

CHAPTER 1

executive summary

SECTIONS
1.01 Purpose and Scope
1.02 Community Engagement
1.03 Vision Framework

The City of El Cerrito and its community members have a long history of investing in their parks and open spaces. Residents volunteer for creek and street clean-ups, City staff carry forward policy and projects that improve air and water quality and conserve resources, and committee members engage in lively discussions about native vegetation, urban forestry and environmental services. As the City begins to respond to a growing regional demand for increased infill development along transit corridors, identifying projects, policies and strategies to create an interconnected network of green places will help accommodate growth while promoting the community’s identity and preserving quality of life.

The Urban Greening Plan synthesizes previous and current planning efforts, builds on past projects, and institutionalizes existing practices to carry out a holistic strategy for urban sustainability. The City’s General Plan (1999), Strategic Plan (2013), Climate Action Plan (2013), and San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan (2014) highlight the importance of creating a complete community that preserves existing natural assets, public places and open spaces, while incentivizing increased, context-sensitive development that provides additional open space. The Plan builds on the City’s commitment to urban sustainability by identifying opportunities to increase the environmental benefits of public infrastructure, parks and natural areas, while addressing the community’s need for diverse, multiuse public places that support and grow community. The Plan outlines over-arching goals, objectives, policies and programs and highlights opportunity projects and focus areas that help implement these goals within the public realm.

The Plan envisions providing the public amenities to support community members as El Cerrito responds to changing regional demographics, economic conditions and funding and policy priorities.

1.01 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of the Plan is to define community priorities towards making a sustainable, vibrant urban environment in order to provide clear direction to City staff and community organizations by:

1. Inventorying existing assets and opportunities to better program parks and green spaces in a more environmentally and economically sustainable manner
2. Analyzing urban greening best practices and defining policy in light of the City's organizational and financial capacity, potential benefits and previously adopted policy direction
3. Defining urban greening goals, objectives and strategies based on early community engagement
4. Ensuring broad community participation to foster a strong, inclusive community vision
5. Developing a list of urban greening projects based on their ability to support and achieve the Plan's goals and objectives and provide multiple community benefits
6. Completing conceptual design of focus area projects that pilot urban greening interventions and provide the City with infrastructure and park design and construction projects primed for funding

1.02 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The City convened a Task Force of engaged stakeholders early on to help guide the planning process. The Task Force met often to review projects, strategies and the vision framework and to advise on community engagement. The City held four, well-attended community workshops and distributed a community survey throughout the planning process to capture community feedback and confirm Plan and project direction. Focus Groups were convened to better understand the needs of historically underrepresented focus populations, such as teens and members of the disabled community.

1.03 VISION FRAMEWORK

The Plan builds on the following overarching goals and objectives identified by the community to achieve a sustainable urban environment.

Overarching Goals



Objectives



SUPPORTING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

- Sustainable Landscapes and Maintenance
- Support Partnerships and Volunteerism

IMPLEMENTATION

This Plan is a long-range effort that identifies important opportunities, pilot projects and focus areas to be built over time. The Plan analyzed key issues in the community and developed the above objectives and 14 focus area projects illustrated on the following page to address them. The City will monitor implementation and will revise the policy and projects as needed.

This document is a long-range plan intended to set aspirational goals to be achieved incrementally, over time, and provides a framework and toolbox for Council, stakeholders and staff to use in ongoing work that moves towards achieving those goals.

Figure 01. Focus Areas



Citywide

- 1. Blue to Green Connections, page 128

Existing Parks

- 2. Ohlone Greenway - Portola to Schmidt, page 101
- 3. Ohlone Greenway - Gladys to Blake, page 102
- 4. Fairmont Park, page 116
- 5. Central Park, page 104
- 6. Creekside Park, page 105
- 7. Hillside Natural Area, page 124

Underutilized Land

- 8. El Cerrito Plaza, page 107
- 9. Conlon Avenue and Key Boulevard, page 108
- 10. Cutting Boulevard and San Pablo Avenue, page 109
- 11. Avila Street and San Pablo Avenue, page 110
- 12. Former Portola Middle School site, page 111

Street ROW

- 13. Ashbury Avenue, page 112
- 14. Lower Fairmount Avenue, page 120