



FILED
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
OAKLAND
2013 MAY 16 PM 3:59

AGENDA REPORT

TO: DEANNA J. SANTANA
CITY ADMINISTRATOR

FROM: Vitaly B. Troyan, P.E.
Director, Public Works Agency

SUBJECT: Infrastructure Report: Parks and
Landscaping and Oakland Parks
Coalition (OPC) Report Response

Date: April 25, 2013

City Administrator
Approval

Date

5/13/13

COUNCIL DISTRICT: City-Wide

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council accept this informational report on the state of the City's Park and Landscape infrastructure as a follow-up to the April 23, 2013, "2012 Infrastructure Report Card". This report also contains follow up information on the Oakland Parks Coalition's (OPC) report presented to the Public Works Committee on February 26, 2013.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview and information on Parks and Landscaping infrastructure and maintenance that includes two region-serving parks, nine community parks, 53 neighborhood parks, 15 special use parks, 26 athletic fields, plus mini-parks, linear parks, dog parks and public grounds. There are another 1,055 acres of Resource Conservation Area (open space) primarily in the Oakland hills, plus approximately 100 landscaped medians and streetscapes that require maintenance. Park and Landscaping received an overall grade of D+ in the Public Works Infrastructure Report Card.

Staff reductions coupled with new and renovated parks and streetscapes have stretched resources to maintain the parks and have resulted in lower service levels and greater deferred maintenance. Lower service levels are seen by the public and this is reflected in the Annual Report by OPC's "2012 Community Report Card on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks."

The OPC's report contained five (5) recommendations to the City Council. In addition, Public Works Committee (PWC) members raised concerns about park maintenance that are addressed in this report. There are short-term and long-term policy and funding issues that need to be prioritized within the budget constraints.

Item: _____
Public Work Committee
May 28, 2013

OUTCOME

This is an informational report, no action is required.

BACKGROUND

On April 23, 2013, the Public Works Agency Infrastructure Report Card was presented to the Public Works Committee. The report provided a report card and information on the state of the City's parks and landscaped areas maintained by PWA. On February 26, 2013 the OPC presented their 2012 Parks Survey Report to the PWC. This report provides additional information on the infrastructure and maintenance of parks, responds to OPC 2012 Report recommendations, and responds to PWC questions from the February 26, 2013 meeting.

ANALYSIS

Infrastructure Report: Park and Landscaping

The "2012 Infrastructure Report Card" follows a series of budget cuts that has negatively impacted park maintenance. Since 2008, full-time park maintenance staffing levels have been reduced by over 50%. Staff reductions were partially offset by the addition of part-time Park Attendant positions. Overall park maintenance service levels have declined due to less skilled part-time staff and added assets. The current staffing results in 12-13/ acres per FTE. Level B Standard is 8/ acres per FTE. For example, in 2009, routine park maintenance was eliminated at mini-parks, neighborhood parks, Special Use Parks, resource conservation areas, parking lots with landscaping and landscaped medians. These landscaped assets receive maintenance based on service requests and periodic staff inspections. City facilities with landscaped assets, athletic fields, community parks and new projects currently receive routine, but reduced service levels.

There are five (5) field level classifications in Park maintenance.

1. Gardener Crew Leader - Responsible for all landscape maintenance in assigned Hub. Oversees work efforts of Gardener I's and Park Attendants.
2. Gardener II - Works with Gardener Crew Leader in Hub and may lead crew in their absence. Performs similar duties as Gardener Crew Leader.
3. Park Attendant - Works under direction of Gardener Crew Leader and Gardener II (at times). Duties include litter pick up and weeding.
4. Park Equipment Operator - Responsible for mowing sports fields, parks, and medians. Operates riding equipment used for park renovations and or major repairs including trenching for plumbers and electricians.
5. Irrigation Repair Specialist - Repairs major irrigation breaks in parks and other landscaped areas. Reviews irrigation plans and provides technical assistance to gardening staff

Operationally, the City is divided into three (3) park maintenance areas: East Oakland, West Oakland, and Central/ Hill Area. In each of these areas there are "Hubs" which generally include one (1) community park and several smaller parks, medians, and City facilities (e.g. libraries, senior centers). This averages to 10-12 sites for each Gardener Crew Leader.

Currently, there are 19 Hubs in the City. Each of the nineteen (19) Gardener Crew Leaders is responsible for a Hub. Before staffing reductions in 2008, there were 32 Hubs each with an assigned Gardener Crew Leader. Each Gardener Crew Leader had at least one (1) Gardener II assigned to the crew along with part-time staff. Today there is one Gardener II for every three Gardener Crew Leaders. These reductions have decreased the City's ability to perform scheduled maintenance in all parks such as pruning, trimming and general landscaping.

In 2012, the Parks Services purchased three (3) mini-packer trucks to increase litter pickup efficiency. The mini packer truck operation has reduced trips to the transfer station, providing for increased staff time in park maintenance activities.

The Park Equipment Operator positions have been reduced by 25% since 2008. The interval between mowing was increased to a three (3) week cycle resulting in complaints from baseball and soccer patrons. There are three (3) Irrigation Repair Specialists for the entire City resulting in many challenges in dealing with water breaks, irrigation and other maintenance problems.

It is estimated that an additional \$4 million (FY12-13 costs) annually is needed to restore staffing levels to achieve a grade B level of park maintenance with a ratio of 8/acres per FTE. An additional \$500,000 is needed for minor capital repairs such as irrigation system upgrades, mowing equipment and materials.

It is critical to identify funding to support operations and maintenance of renovated or new landscaped assets prior to the approval of the capital plan or project. The Measure DD projects at Lake Merritt and the Waterfront trail have added acres of new landscaped areas without any maintenance. PWA will continue to leverage volunteer resources to help support our parks. These efforts will help, although many tasks must be done by City staff in order to maintain quality parks.

Oakland Parks Coalition Report

The Oakland Parks Coalition (OPC) was formed in 2006 and their first task was to survey the conditions found in Oakland parks and to report their findings to the City Council. The survey was intended to be an objective and thorough evaluation tool that could be used year after year to see the trends and opportunities to improve park maintenance. The OPC summarized park maintenance staff reductions and new parks and streetscapes that have been added, and despite these significant changes, the average park conditions appear to be relatively stable. The overall ratings for 2011 and 2012 are identical.

The past two OPC surveys scores were almost identical meaning there hasn't been a perceived change in park maintenance in the eyes of the surveyors. However, deferred maintenance such as the lack of regular replanting of turf, trees and shrubs, the lack of application of organic matter to planting beds, the delayed repairs to irrigation systems, the 3-week mowing schedules and a lack of institutional knowledge will eventually result in higher capital costs for park restoration.

The 2012 OPC Report made five (5) recommendations:

1. Hold the line on maintenance cutbacks
2. Invest in an additional Irrigation Repair Specialist
3. Fill the Park Volunteer Coordinator position
4. Gopher invasion must be stopped
5. Budget for New Equipment

Response to OPC Report Recommendations

1. Hold the line on maintenance cutbacks: The FY 2013-15 Budget is not proposing any reductions to park funding, although the current levels will still result in areas of no routine maintenance. Park maintenance is funded by the Landscaping and Lighting Assessment District (62%) and the Comprehensive Cleanup Fund for litter removal (38%). The LLAD revenue, set in 1993, has not increased for 20 years. The LLAD revenue is not adjusted by CPI or other methods. However, costs for labor and material have increased. Since 1993, the last time the LLAD was adjusted, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the Bay Area increased from 146.3 to 239.7 – nearly 65 percent. This fixed revenue has led to major reductions to park maintenance staffing over the past 10 years. Since 2007, over 50% in fulltime staff (gardeners) have been eliminated.
2. Invest in an additional Irrigation Repair Specialist: PWA agrees that a fourth Irrigation Repair Specialist would assist with response time for repairs. The irrigation system is the most critical infrastructure found in a park. A properly working irrigation system is essential for keeping the landscaping and turf green and healthy. During the spring and summer months, irrigation repair requests are significantly greater than the staffing available, resulting in delays in making repairs. These delays can result in brown spots on turf, and stress on trees and shrubs, making them more susceptible to insect and pathogen attacks, and generally looking poorly maintained. At this time no funding is available to add a new position at a cost of \$110,000 for the position and \$5,000 for tools and equipment.
3. Fill the Park Volunteer Coordinator position: The City agrees that volunteers are critical to supporting park maintenance. The volunteer program is managed by the Environmental Services Division. The recruitment for the vacant position in the Adopt A Spot volunteer program is underway and expected to be completed within 2 months.

4. Gopher invasion must be stopped: PWA has addressed gopher issues in many parks. However, this year the problem has greatly expanded in West Oakland. PWA has a contract with a gopher abatement company to address this issue. Trapping began in March at two West Oakland parks (DeFremery Park and South Prescott Park). Trapping is more labor intensive and will result in an initial higher cost (\$4800 for 4 months), but the environmental risk is lower for trapping vs. baiting. As of early April, the gopher population has been reduced by 245 at DeFremery Park and 112 at South Prescott Park.
5. Budget for New Equipment: Given the lack of equipment replacement funds, the purchasing of new mowers is not scheduled at this time. The existing mowing equipment averages over nine years old and is essential for keeping the turf cut to an appropriate height. When the aging equipment is out of service for repairs, the ability to mow lawns at athletic fields and other heavily used parks is impacted.

The LLAD Fund does not have funding for the purchase of new equipment. Discussions with Equipment Services Division on this need will take place to see what options are available.

Questions from Public Works Committee

Public Works Committee, at its February 26, 2013 meeting asked staff to respond to the following questions regarding the OPC report.

1. What are the funding options for increasing park maintenance?
 2. What are the opportunities for leveraging resources through other agencies?
 3. How can park restroom maintenance be improved?
1. Generating New Revenue. Options for increasing Park Maintenance funding include a Special Tax District and Special Assessment District. Although there may be different laws that allow the City to finance annual costs to improve and maintain parks, they all fall within these two types of financing districts.

Special Tax District

The formation of a special tax district requires 2/3 registered voter approval of those who vote. Each registered voter within the boundaries of the special tax district is eligible to cast one vote. When tabulating the votes all votes count equally.

The Law allows the City to tax any property that generally benefits from the improvements and/or services being provided. In the case of funding parks, the City could charge 100% of the annual park improvements and/or services cost to the property owners living within the special tax district. The City could also exclude certain classes of properties or individuals

Item: _____
Public Works Committee
May 28, 2013

(e.g. low income groups, seniors, tax exempt parcels, etc.) from the special tax and not be liable for paying their share of the special tax.

The special tax rate can also be levied based upon various criteria. For example, each parcel could be taxed equally, or tax each class of property equally (e.g. commercial, industrial, institutional, etc.) or levy a tax based on parcel area or building sq. ft., etc. Under the Special Tax District option the City will not be able to tax government property owners.

This process involving the formation of a citywide special taxing district requires City Council to adopt a resolution to direct the Registrar of Voters to place the measure on the ballot. If the City wants to form a non-citywide special taxing district, the City would need to form a Community Facilities District (a.k.a. Mello-Roos District). The process for the formation of a Community Facilities District is generally as follows and can take 9 to 12 months:

- 1) Council Meeting to Adopt a Resolution of Intention
- 2) Council Meeting to Conduct a Public Hearing
- 3) Either the County or City would conduct a registered voter election
- 4) Council meeting to Certify the Results of the Election authorizing the levy of a special tax
- 5) Council meeting for 2nd reading of an Ordinance for a Special Tax District

Special Assessment District

The formation of a Special Assessment District requires 50% property owner approval of those property owners who vote. When tabulating the ballots, each ballot is weighted by each property owner's total assessment amount.

The Law requires the City to assess each parcel of land within the boundaries of the assessment district in proportion to the amount of special benefit they receive from the proposed improvements and/or services. In the case of funding parks, the City would not be able to charge 100% of the annual park improvement and/or services cost to the property owners within the boundaries of the special assessment district if it is determined that parcels outside of the assessment district receive special benefit or if there is any general benefit associated with the park improvements and/or services. The City would need to pick up these costs. In addition, the City could not exclude certain classes of properties or individuals (e.g. low income groups, seniors, tax exempt parcels, etc.) from the special assessment if it is found that they receive special benefit from the park improvements and/or services.

The process involving the formation of a special assessment district is generally as follows and can take 8 to 12 months to form:

- 1) Council Meeting to Adopt a Resolution of Intention
 - 2) Mail out assessment notices and ballots to property owners
 - 3) Council Meeting to Conduct a Public Hearing (this meeting gets continued so ballots can be counted)
 - 4) Council meeting to complete the Public Hearing, Certify the Ballot Tabulation, Form District
2. Inter-Agency Opportunities. Public Works staff did reach out to Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) and will be working with the Office of Parks and Recreation to have the discussions with the East Bay Regional Park District and the Oakland Unified School District to seek opportunities for collaboration.

Maintenance Agreements with BART and the City are in place for the areas under the elevated structures throughout Oakland. These Agreements were executed in the 1970's and require that the City of Oakland assume all responsibility for maintenance of landscaping, litter removal, and replacement of dead plants under the elevated BART tracks. These are continuing Agreements and there are no provisions for cancellation. The City will discuss options with BART as the continued low level of resources available is not adequate to manage the assets in the Agreements, however, the agreements provide for BART billing the City if maintenance is deemed inadequate. This is a challenge as many of the landscaped areas are aged and worn from wear over the past 40 years.

3. Park Restroom Maintenance. The Facilities Services Division (FSD) is responsible for providing custodial and maintenance services at park facilities, including park restrooms. Custodial service is performed one time per day, seven days per week, excluding Mandatory Business Closure Days.

The equivalent of three FTE custodians are assigned to clean the 34 freestanding park restrooms. The custodians work from 6 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. seven days per week. The restrooms are unlocked between 6 a.m. - 10 a.m. daily and are closed and locked at dusk by staff from the Office of Parks and Recreation (OPR).

Due to increased usage on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, two of the three FTE-equivalent custodians are assigned solely to opening, cleaning, disinfecting and restocking the park restrooms.

When restrooms are found to be unsafe or in disrepair, the custodian is responsible for taking the restroom out of service. This includes posting signage, securing the restroom, and notifying his/her supervisor so the repairs can be coordinated and performed by Building Services. Once the repairs are made, the restrooms are cleaned and put back into service. The length of time the restroom is out of service depends on the nature of the problem. Some restrooms are subject to higher levels of vandalism, misuse and abuse.

Improvements could be made by insuring restrooms are secured at night and by increasing staffing levels. This activity is funded by the LLAD, which has no additional revenue at this time.

Park users are encouraged to report issues such as lack of service, problems with plumbing, lighting, or broken fixtures, by calling the Public Works Call Center at (510) 615-5566, or email at pwacallcenter@oaklandnet.com, or by using the mobile app "SeeClickFix." Reporting problems assures repairs are made in a timely manner and restrooms are placed back in service.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST

The OPC has assisted the city's volunteer program tremendously with outreach in many areas of Oakland. We will continue to need their support as new projects, which do not include funding for maintenance, are completed.

COORDINATION

The Office of Parks and Recreation (OPR), PWA Equipment Services Division (ESD), Facilities Services Division (FSD), City Attorney and Budget Offices have been consulted with and gave input for this report.

COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATION

None. This report is submitted for information only.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES


Economic: Parks increase property value because it is a neighborhood asset. Park use permits and rental fees generate revenue for the Office of Parks and Recreation.

Environmental: Parks provide multiple environmental benefits, such as plants that produce oxygen, trees that filter air, flowers that attract bees and a safe habitat for native flora and fauna.

Social Equity: Parks are a vital part of our community and provide a venue for healthy activities that are essential to daily living. They provide a safe environment for the public.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Brian Carthan, Park Supervisor II, at
(510) 615-5510.

Respectfully submitted,


VITALY B. TROYAN, P.E.
Director, Public Works Agency

Reviewed by:
Brooke A. Levin, Assistant Director
Department of Facilities and Environment

Prepared by:
Brian Carthan, Park Supervisor II
Park and Building Services Division, PWA