

Yolo County Parks & Open Space Master Plan

Meeting Summary

County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife
Advisory Committee

2 May 2005

6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Yolo County Board of Supervisors Chambers
County Administration Building
625 Court Street
Woodland, CA 95695

Advisory Committee Members: Sally Barrett, Robert Beggs, Dirk Brazil, Diane Colborn, Andrew Fulks (Chair), Gerald Hartwig, Jennifer Henning, Don Morrill, Mary Schiedt

County Staff: Brett Williams, Parks and Natural Resources Supervisor, County Planning and Public Works Department

Consultant Staff: Brian Collett, The Dangermond Group; and Bruce Kemp, Roberts, Kemp & Associates LLC

Agenda Item: Discussion of Recommendations for Revisions to the Draft Parks and Open Space Master Plan

Introduction

The Yolo County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee met on Monday, 2 May 2005, in the Board of Supervisors Chambers, County Administration Building, Woodland. The above-referenced item was on the Regular Agenda. Approximately 20 members of the public attended the meeting, in addition to the committee, elected officials, staff, and consultants. Supervisor Yamada and Supervisor Chamberlain attended the meeting; Deputy to Supervisor Thomson, Beth Gabor also attended.

Notice regarding this meeting was sent in advance of the date by email to all parties who have expressed interest the Parks Master Plan project. As indicated in the email notice, the recommendations for revisions of the Draft Master Plan have been summarized in the form of a “working paper,” which responds to public comments received during the public comment period for the Draft Master Plan. The working paper is available on the Parks and Open Space Master Plan website at http://www.yolocounty.org/prm/master_plan.htm.

Presentation

Mr. Williams reviewed the major milestones in the planning process, including the development of the current recommendations. He reviewed the issues of significant concern, as discussed in the working paper:

- Timing of plan implementation;
- Emphasis on existing park and open space facilities;
- The Blue Ridge Trail;
- Identification of private lands as future parks or open space areas;
- Eminent domain; and
- Conaway Ranch.

Mr. Williams noted that the initial Park System Map was problematic because people tended to interpret the delineation of general areas as public lands already open to public use; linear elements tended to imply acquisition as well. He indicated that the revised plan would retain and better explain the “gateway” idea.

He also explained that the revised plan would include a new, separate section on issues related to agriculture. He noted that the plan would emphasize a variety of ways to provide and increase recreation opportunities in a “menu” of options. He referred to the Sonoma Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District as one example of how a jurisdiction can set up financing for a multiple-purpose district, based on a ¼ percent sales tax.

Mr. Williams also briefly reviewed the “general themes” that are proposed to be applied in the revision of the Draft Master Plan. The general themes to be applied in the plan revision are as follows:

- The planning context;
- Document organization and structure;
- Agricultural land use;
- Existing County parks;
- Future County park and open space needs;
- The County’s roles in providing and facilitating parks, recreation, and open space; and
- Financing and implementation.

Mr. Williams invited discussion by the Committee and members of the public: “Are we headed in the right direction?”

Responding to an inquiry from a Committee member, Mr. Williams also explained that the next steps in the process involve: continuing to receive input on the proposed

recommendations, an update on the process with the Board of Supervisors on 17 May, preparation and publication of a revised draft master plan, a three-week comment period on the revised draft plan, and a public meeting with the Parks Advisory Committee. (The approximate timeframe for these activities is May through July. The process will also include preparation of a programmatic environmental document and finalization of the master plan at the Board of Supervisors.)

Public Comments

Comments by Dave Pratt

Mr. Pratt offered the opinion that the proposed recommendations represented a “major retreat” from the previous draft of the plan. He stated that he had hiked the current Blue Ridge Trail, and he indicated that he supported references to the extended trail in the plan. He questioned whether a 50-year planning horizon for the plan would mean that there would be a long wait before the next opportunity would arise to address park planning in the County.

Comments by Frank Greer

In Mr. Greer’s opinion, the planning team had done an excellent job in defining the issues, reviewing comments, and developing recommendations. He noted that the planning team took some criticism on the initial draft plan; however, the working paper indicates that the team has been responsive to comments.

Comments by William Chapman

Mr. Chapman continued remarks from previous meetings that were critical of some parts of the planning process. He indicated that he had not received any response to his offer to sponsor a hike on his property (the offer involved a number of conditions and fees), with the exception of the Chair of the Board of Supervisors who had declined. He also suggested that the revised plan incorporate “urban destinations.”

Comments by Bob Schneider

Bob Schneider, representing Tuleyome and the local Sierra Club chapter, responded to the discussion question and stated that, in his opinion, the plan was not headed in the right direction. He said that he appreciated the visionary quality of the first draft plan; in his view, the proposed revisions would reduce the document to more of a manual than a visionary plan. He encouraged participants to think about the County as it might be 50 years into the future.

In his opinion, a connected Blue Ridge Trail should be retained in the plan; he referred to the Bay Area Ridge Trail as a good example. Working with landowners and willing sellers, he said, is a positive approach. He agreed with the removal of the Conaway Ranch, under the current circumstances. He requested that the planning team meet with local environmental groups including the Sierra Club; he expressed concern that considerable time had been spent meeting with rural landowner interests and the process may have become somewhat “skewed.” He wants the process to be balanced.

He also requested the release of Appendix D to the draft master plan, “Environmental Resources and Conservation Opportunities,” which to date had not been made publicly available.

Comments by Charlie Rominger

Mr. Rominger commented that the first draft of the plan was controversial and confrontational. The lines drawn on map alarmed people who lived in those areas. He commended staff for their “catch-up” work, and suggested that new opportunities and ideas had been uncovered through this additional input. He indicated that the proposed revisions suggested a more cooperative approach, which was also more constructive because it sought to work with the people who are actually out there on the land.

Committee Discussion

Discussion ensued among the members of the Parks Advisory Committee, generally following the issues and themes presented in the working paper. The discussion including the following items:

Timing of Plan Implementation

- Ms. Schiedt suggested that the parks master plan should provide both near-term details as well as a long-range, 50-year vision. She noted that unknown events in future may, in part, determine what actions will actually be taken.
- Mr. Morrill agreed that the plan should be a long-range document, but also an opportunity to set priorities, particularly for existing park improvements.
- Mr. Fulks noted that the plan would likely be implemented as funding became available (making it difficult to identify near-term and long-term activities in advance). He indicated that the existing park units should be a high priority.
- Mr. Brazil stressed the need to retain the broad, visionary nature of the plan, understanding that the concepts would evolve over time. He noted the long-term nature of plan and the need for flexibility. He also noted the importance of continuing to keep private landowners involved.
- Mr. Beggs suggested that there could be groups of implementation actions in terms of long- and short-term goals.
- Ms. Hennings added that what may be needed in the revised plan is actually a clarification that this plan is meant to be a long-term plan.

Existing Parks and Open Space Facilities

- Ms. Schiedt suggested that it made sense to put emphasis on existing parks and open space areas, while also leaving open the “wise expansion” of the park system.
- Mr. Hartwig supported the idea of improving existing park units. He stated his belief that the existing units are underutilized, and the County needs to fully address and develop its current parks before moving on to additional areas.

- Ms. Colborn commented that looking at both existing and long-term park and recreation needs is important. There needs to be good stewardship of existing parks while looking ahead and meeting needs of the future.
- Mr. Morrill commented that he agreed with the working paper response regarding this issue, i.e., that the plan will be revised to place further emphasis on the County's existing parks and open spaces.
- Mr. Fulks commented that the plan needs to look at both the existing parks and future needs. He favored adding more text to the discussion of existing parks.
- Ms. Barrett commented that the existing parks are underutilized; she noted that in the revision of the plan, there would be opportunities to address financial implementation for supporting and maintaining existing parks.
- Mr. Beggs said that he thought the first draft of the master plan did well in describing existing parks.

Blue Ridge Trail

- Ms. Schiedt acknowledged that the Blue Ridge Trail was a controversial issue, but the plan should include the idea in concept because it could possibly be developed in the future, piece by piece, under "amiable conditions."
- Mr. Hartwig commented that he agreed with the working paper response regarding this issue, i.e., that references to the Blue Ridge Trail south of Otis Ranch would be removed from maps and texts.
- Ms. Colborn stated that, as a hiker, she liked the concept (of a through trail).
- Mr. Morrill agreed with the Blue Ridge Trail concept. In his opinion, the idea won't go away just because it's not drawn on a map.
- Mr. Fulks suggesting revising the map to remove the dotted lines across private lands but retaining the lines on public lands. The overall concept is to go from one end to the other; the trail could be on the Napa County side of the ridge. He noted that the Open Space and Recreation Element of the County General Plan supported access to public land.
- Mr. Brazil suggested that the plan could include a discussion on the pros and cons of the trail, to show that the County is serious about balancing public access with private property issues.
- Mr. Beggs stated that the trail was a nice idea but a low priority. He felt that too much emphasis had been given to the trail issue.
- The consultants noted that the first draft of the plan did include some discussion of the Blue Ridge Trail in the text (page III-25).
- The consensus reached by the Committee was to include the trail as a concept in the text of the plan, with references to the language in the General Plan Open Space and Recreation Element.

Private lands

- Ms. Shiedt said that she felt that the draft plan was too specific regarding private lands, and that the revised plan should talk more about willing sellers.
- Mr. Hartwig stated – and emphasized – his opinion that no specific private lands should be identified.
- Ms. Colborn noted that there were really no references to specific sites in plan, other than on the map.
- Mr. Fulks suggested that future parks and open space areas could be discussed in relation to ecoregions.

Eminent Domain

- Mr. Hartwig stated his preference that the revised plan clearly state that the County will not use eminent domain, and he recommended that the suggested language in the working paper be modified to remove the idea of “intent” (as in “... not the County’s intent to use eminent domain...”). Discussion ensued. Mr. Williams explained that the language was developed in consultation with County Counsel; it would be inappropriate to bind future Boards of Supervisors.

Planning Context & Agricultural Land Use

- Ms. Barrett suggested that additional demographic information should be added to the plan – e.g., the number of people in the County, population distribution, populations in cities versus unincorporated rural areas, etc.
- Committee members suggested that plan should make clear that agricultural use in some cases is “industrial” and may exclude recreation. On the other hand, small farms may be more compatible with public recreation; some small farms, for example, may want to participate in agri-tourism activities.
- Committee members noted that agriculture provides open space, even though it may be essentially “visual open space.”
- Regarding hunting, Mr. Fulks noted that plan should be clear that hunting clubs and related user fees on private lands may present barriers for some people. Mr. Fulks also suggested that while references to policies in the Agriculture Element of the General Plan should be included, these should be weighed against other policies in the Open Space and Recreation Element.

Future County Park and Open Space Needs

- Ms. Shiedt suggested that the plan continue to consider social needs in recreation, particularly the evolving demographics of our society.
- Mr. Morrill said that the proposed recommendation to consider a broader menu for the expansion of recreation opportunities was, in his opinion, the best part of the working paper.

County's Roles in Providing Parks, Recreation & Open Space

- Mr. Williams explained that the role of the County with regard to parks, recreation, and open space will be clarified in the revised plan, as described in the working paper.
- Ms. Colborn indicated that she like the idea of partnering with adjacent jurisdictions.

Implementation/ financing

- Committee members indicated general support for the concept of County partnerships with private interests. Mr. Fulks commented that such County-private recreation opportunities should be equitable and affordable, generally on a scale that is comparable to what the County would require under similar circumstances.
- Mr. Brazil commented that public-private partnerships could be the wave of the future; he suggested that this concept should be fleshed out in the revised plan.
- Committee members generally supported the multiple-purpose (agriculture, open space, recreation) district idea. Comments were made indicating that there should be a balance between agriculture and open space and recreation.
- Ms. Barrett referred to the East Bay Regional Park model; she noted that private property values are increasing as result of this district's land investments.
- Ms. Hennings commented that the plan should include as many options as possible, a menu of options for the future.

Itemized Revisions Table in the Working Paper

The Committee generally addressed the table of itemized revision suggestions and responses presented in the working paper. Mr. Hartwig said that the proposed recommendations were good suggestions; he will wait and see what the revised draft plan actually says. Mr. Morrill thought the working paper did a good job encapsulating the comments; he, too, wants to see the revised plan.

With regard to item 30 pertaining to the Cache Creek bridge, Mr. Fulks suggested that it should be a suspension footbridge at the Middle Site.

With regard to item 51 pertaining to provisions for a possible OHV park, Ms. Barrett suggested that the revised plan should identify other ways to accommodate and designate OHV use, not just former gravel-mining areas.