

Griffith Park Master Plan – Working Group Meeting Summary – October 16, 2006

The Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group convened their meeting on Monday, October 16, 2006, at 6:30 p.m. at the Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium.

Present: Working Group – Bernadette Soter, Clare Darden, Craig Kessler, George Grace, Gerry Hans, Jeff Gardner, Jose Sigala, Louis Alvarado, Richard Bogy, Lucinda Phillips (alternate for Susan Swan), and Valerie Vanaman.

Mark Mariscal, Recreation and Parks
Marilyn J. White, Recreation and Parks

Absent: Lynn Brown

Facilitator: Kevin Regan, Assistant General Manager, Department of Recreation and Parks

Mr. Regan opened the meeting by calling the role of the Working Group and explained that due to the Observatory opening, Vicki Israel would be assigned to that project on a full-time basis until a couple of months after it opens. In her place, Marilyn White would be managing the Griffith Region. He then introduced Marilyn to the Working Group. Mr. Regan also introduced the new supervisor to Forestry, Laura Bauernfeind. And, he announced that a senior maintenance position had just been funded for Griffith Region. Tom McCall is the person assigned to the job.

Ms. Darden shared with the Working Group that Huell Howser was filming in Griffith Park and that the program would be broadcast on November 2 and 15. She encouraged everyone to try and view it.

A short discussion on the status of the meeting summaries followed. Mr. Hans reported that except for the change request for the May summary, the rest of the meeting summaries had been reviewed and were ready to be posted on the Department's website.

Mr. Regan asked the Working Group about future chapters. Ms. Soter stated that the sub-committee agreed that the Working Group lacked the technical expertise necessary to deal with watershed issues so they would skip that chapter and go on to the Park Management chapter. She requested if the General Manager, Mr. Mukri, could address the Working Group regarding park management and also asked if recent revenue and budget figures could be provided.

Ms. Vanaman also asked that at the next meeting in November, there be discussions on park management, how to synthesize the written chapters into a single document, and what resources would be available to do this. She also requested if subject matter experts could advise them on what topics to be included in the Environment Chapter.

Mr. Hans asked about the appropriateness of requesting funding for their work at the meeting with the General Manager. Mr. Kessler also asked if they could be provided with an explanation about the next steps to be taken with the re-draft as no funds have been currently identified to complete the project. Mr. Regan indicated that he was positive funding would be available, but

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did not know how or when this would occur. Mr. Grace asked if funds could be used from the methane gas revenue at Toyon. Mr. Regan replied that that request would have to be researched.

Mr. Regan reminded audience members that the Working Group Meeting does not follow parliamentary procedure and that any discussions would be amongst Working Group members only. However, at the end of the meeting, the audience would be allowed to comment and have up to two minutes to do so.

Ms. Soter summarized the Mobility Chapter and stated that the findings and recommendations are based on the following two key elements:

1. For the past two decades, increased density in housing and commercial development has been authorized by City officials and the various planning and development agencies and departments of the City of Los Angeles. This has been predicated on the notion that increasing population, and changing economic and environment conditions will require Angelenos to transition from individually owned automobiles to public transit as their primary mode of transportation.

Planning for Griffith Park's next 25 years should be aligned with this vision. Priority should be given to promoting bus, light rail, subway and alternative transportation to and from the Park. To move visitors through the Park who arrive by public modes, steps should be taken to implement a shuttle system that will service its most popular facilities and major attractions.

2. Mobility solutions should support the Park's identity as the City's great Urban Wilderness. Access and transportation policies and practices should be implemented that emphasize, instead of blur, the difference between the Park and its urban milieu. For example, in the City at large, priority is given to speeding the flow of traffic to benefit commuters, but in the Park emphasis should be placed on moderating speed and discouraging through-driving. In the City, buses, bus shelters and benches are considered advertising mediums, but in the Park buses, shuttles and their attendant street furniture should eschew commercialization. Whereas asphalt, concrete and other impermeable parking lot surfaces are preferable in a city setting, natural and permeable surfaces are better attuned to the Park's identity.

In keeping with these key elements – the need to promote public and alternative transportation in the face of rising density and the Park's identity as an Urban Wilderness – priority should be placed on encouraging the least polluting, most energy-efficient and quietest mobility modes, establishing linkages to this multi-modal transportation system at major Park centers, and similar steps to reduce dependence on automobiles.

Motorized vehicles were defined as automobiles, buses, and service and safety vehicles. Major gateways to the Park were identified and entrances should indicate that you have left the City and are now entering a park. There are 38 miles of paved roads in Griffith Park. Roads currently closed should remain closed for safety and security reasons as well as the cost to re-open them would be prohibitive. One of the biggest problems is through auto traffic. Griffith Park lacks public transit and there is currently only one MTA route that runs through the Park. Solutions include the expansion of DASH routes and ultimately, a free shuttle service throughout the Park. Parking should remain free and priority should be given to resurfacing existing asphalt with water-permeable materials. Parking structures bring non-park experiences with noise and light pollution. If the need for mass parking becomes necessary, it should be found outside of the

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Park with the use of a shuttle program. Special event and seasonal parking present minimal problems. The use of shuttle systems during large special events have proved successful. Railroads, aerial tramways, and funiculars do not fit in with the Urban Wilderness Identity. An accurate visitor brochure would be a great asset. Road maintenance should be done in a way as to preserve adjacent greenery.

Non-Motorized access and circulation refer to runners, hikers, pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians. These people access the Park from all sides. There are 53 miles of dirt trails throughout the Park. There are currently no formal trail heads but some type of formal system is needed. Landslides and erosion are the trail system's two biggest enemies. There are 26 miles of bicycle routes. Specific goals and objectives were reviewed.

Ms. Darden applauded the work done. Mr. Alvarado recommended that the Department not maintain the trails, but that the work be completed by volunteer groups such as the Sierra Club; as machinery of any kind damages the trails. After a short discussion, it was decided that item 'I' under No. 7, be eliminated. It was suggested that trails be numbered rather than named as trails are known by a variety of informal names.

Chief Ranger Albert Torres shared that maps of Griffith Park are available to the public. In his opinion, trail names among user groups are more similar than different. He also stated that aerial photographs are more accurate than maps in assisting them with search and rescue or fire suppression efforts. He stated that a numbering system to label trails was previously done, but that it needed to be refined.

Mr. Sigala thanked the sub-committee for their work on this chapter. He shared that since Griffith Park is a regional park, it would be advantageous to mention that people from surrounding cities such as Glendale and Burbank as well as from other areas of the City also utilize Griffith Park. He also stated the need to encourage community leaders to provide for more public transportation surrounding the Park. Mr. Sigala asked for clarification on park roads versus City streets, and asked about the process of having them repaired.

Mr. Regan replied that there is a difference between dedicated park roads and City streets. Park roads are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Recreation and Parks and it is the Department's responsibility to repair the roads. Traffic and parking signage is also the Department's responsibility. Dedicated City streets are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Street Services and the Bureau of Engineering. The Department of Transportation is responsible for traffic and parking signage.

Mr. Sigala recommended that the differences between a park road and City street be included in the Mobility Chapter.

Mr. Kessler shared his proposed amendments to the Mobility Chapter. He suggested that portions of roads currently closed be made available as a temporary alternate route during special events to alleviate traffic congestion. Mr. Gardner asked about the niche parking proposal in the amendments. Mr. Kessler responded that parking challenges are experienced at both major golf complexes in Griffith Park even though the Park does not close for lack of parking. He stated

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that he did not want people to be prevented from visiting Griffith Park for lack of available parking. Mr. Kessler recommended that further discussion of his amendments be held over until the next meeting due to the lack of time.

Mr. Grace stated that the issue of Observatory parking was not currently addressed in the Mobility Chapter and that it needed to be addressed.

Mr. Gardner wanted to add additional information to the Mobility Chapter stating that in the long term, the only viable way to add additional visitors to the park without increasing the number of cars would be the installation of a subway stop at the Zoo and Autry locations.

Ms. Phillips shared that at a PROS Committee Meeting, Wolfgang Puck representatives stated they would occasionally hold special events at the Observatory until 1 am. Mr. Regan responded that most concessions have operating agreements but that extended hours would require Department approval. Ms. Soter stated additional concerns regarding Wolfgang Puck closing off portions of the Observatory to the public. Mr. Regan replied that Ms. Israel would be able to address some of these concerns at the next Working Group Meeting.

Public Comments included the following:

- It would be great to take the train or subway to Griffith Park. However, using a shuttle to get into the Park is not convenient or conducive for families transporting picnic gear. Preferential parking should be provided to cars with three or more persons.
- Building roads into the wilderness is the “beginning of the end.” Keeping the interior roads closed is a wonderful asset.
- A magnificent job was done on the restoration of the Observatory.
- Trails should be both named and numbered.
- There is a hesitation to base the parking needs of Griffith Park on 18 days of intensive use. Every other State park or beach has a saturation point and when there is no more parking, people have to turn around and leave.
- Use a pedestrian approach for Griffith Park where visitors park elsewhere, and walk or ride their bicycles into the Park.
- Two Red Line stations are located within a mile from Griffith Park and the Metro Link Amtrak station in Glendale is located nearby. Parking structures are dangerous and pose safety issues.
- The City has turned Griffith Observatory into a money making location.
- A larger easement is needed in the Vista del Vallje area for equestrians and the trails there need to be better maintained.

The next Working Group meeting will be held Monday, November 6, 2006. This concluded the Working Group meeting for October 16.