

Griffith Park Master Plan – Working Group Meeting Summary – November 6, 2006

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

Present: Working Group - Bernadette Soter, Clare Darden, Craig Kessler, George Grace, Jerry Hans, Jeff Gardner, Jose Sigala, Louis Alvarado, Lynn Brown, Richard Bogy, Susan Swan, and Valerie Vanaman
Patricia Malone, Council District 4
Rory Fitzpatrick, Council District 4
Mike Shull, Recreation and Parks
Mark Mariscal, Recreation and Parks
Vicki Israel, Recreation and Parks
Marilyn White, Recreation and Parks

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

Mr. Regan began the meeting by calling the roll of Working Group members. The latest map of Griffith Park that was recently completed by the Real Estate Section of Recreation and Parks, was provided to Working Group members. Mr. Hans asked if the LA River adjacent to the Park was considered part of Griffith Park. Mr. Shull replied that the river is not part of the park. Mr. Gardner asked if North Atwater Park is part of Griffith Park and he also inquired about the size in acres, of CSY. Mr. Shull responded that North Atwater Park is part of Griffith Park and that the approximate size of CSY is 31 acres. He stated that it took full-time staff months to put together the current map and that it is the most up-to-date and accurate map of Griffith Park.

Mr. Regan briefly informed the audience of the meeting's guidelines and stated that there would be no engagement with the audience during the meeting. Parliamentary procedures would not be followed, but at the end of the meeting, public comments would be heard.

Vicki Israel, Griffith Observatory; Mike Honan, Concessions; and Bill Mathews, the Vice President of Wolfgang Puck Catering, were also present.

Mr. Honan explained that he has been with the Department for five years and oversees the concession program. One of the program's main goals is service to the public, because it is not economically feasible for the City to provide certain services. Agreements are entered with contractors to provide those services and this is done through a competitive process as required by the City Charter. Currently, there are 51 concessions with the Department of Recreation and Parks. In 2005, close to \$51 million was generated in gross sales that included \$6 million in rent. There are 16 concessions located in Griffith Park with sales of \$25 million.

Ms. Soter stated that aspects of the Observatory restaurant duplicate it as a destination and luxury restaurant. She stated the daytime café operation was not an issue, but issue is the 180 catered events to be held at the Observatory by Wolfgang Puck that would privatize portions of the Observatory during public hours and would undermine the Observatory's mission as an educational institution.

Ms. Israel stated that there is no agreement for 180 events. She explained that according to the RAP board report approved on August 9, 2007, the event season at the Observatory is from October 1 through April 1, which is approximately 180 days, so that a misunderstanding about the number of events could have come from that information. She further stated that an event every day during the event season would be ludicrous.

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Ms. Soter stated that the misinformation came from Wolfgang Puck in an e-mail which stated they would like to hold up to 180 events a year, including after hours events until 1:00 a.m.

Ms. Israel also informed the Working Group that changes have been made to the prior agreement with Wolfgang Puck. She then introduced Bill Matthews, the Vice President of Operations for Wolfgang Puck. Mr. Matthews assured the Working Group that the Observatory restaurant menu is affordable and family friendly. They are a “grab and go” set up and that on occasion, events will be held at the Observatory. He explained that everything done at the Observatory has to be set up and broken down, and that their obligation is to work with Observatory staff.

Ms. Israel explained that the decision to have an event is not made by Wolfgang Puck, but through the Department via a permit procedure. There is an entire procedure that must be followed. She reminded the Working Group that the Observatory just opened to the public and is not yet ready to host special events. The hours of operation are Tuesday through Friday, 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., and closed Mondays.

Ms. Soter stated that prior to the Observatory closing for renovation, it was available for filming on Mondays only. She asked if this same schedule would be followed. Ms. Israel stated she was not aware of this past practice.

Ms. Vanaman asked for clarification regarding the process to approve permits. Ms. Israel replied that the Department has a procedure for all rental facilities but due to the Observatory's uniqueness, it would have a tailor made procedure. Currently, this procedure is still being developed. Ms. Vanaman then asked how they could get information regarding the procedure. Ms. Israel stated it would be a public process.

Ms. Soter stated that the public's concern was the privatization of public space at the Observatory to generate profits for private companies such as Wolfgang Puck. Mr. Mariscal shared that the Department currently allows public buildings and spaces for exclusive use for a fee and have done so since the 1950s.

Mr. Honan said that displacement was a consideration during the RFP process and that all of the concerns being discussed were taken into consideration.

Ms. Soter shared that the document the Working Group is referring to is the report from the General Manager dated August 9, 2006. She pointed out that the report says 80% of the revenues collected is deposited into the General Fund and that it does not benefit the Observatory or Griffith Park. Mr. Mariscal clarified that the general fund referred to in that report is the Department's General Fund. He further explained that 20% of the Observatory's funds stay at the Observatory whereas this does not apply to other locations. Mr. Regan stated that the Department invests more monies into the Observatory than is generated by the facility.

Mr. Gardner thanked Council District 4 for the tour of the Observatory and thanked Ms. Israel for the shuttle buses. He asked if patrons would go to the Observatory via shuttle buses. Mr. Regan stated that the shuttle buses were being used to off set traffic. At some point, the Observatory rush will subside and parking at the Observatory will be allowed.

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Ms. Brown asked for clarification of the general fund. Mr. Regan explained that the City has a General Fund and that every operating department also has their own general fund. The Department of Recreation and Parks has a general operating fund. The City sets a revenue requirement for the Department. Concession revenues go into the Department's general fund to off-set revenue requirements. Millions of dollars are spent in the parks for maintenance and upgrades. Mr. Regan explained that it is not uncommon for the Department to rent facilities, including gyms. Whenever this happens, displacement is always a consideration.

Mr. Hans said that Mr. Comer, Wolfgang Puck's attorney, was not aware of the August 9 Schedule of Rates and Fees. It seems that the contract conflicts with the August 9 document. Mr. Matthews says that he does not see 180 events taking place at the Observatory. A request for a wedding would follow Department protocol.

Mr. Alvarado stated that there is a lot of gossip surrounding the Observatory. He thanked Ms. Israel for doing a good job.

Public Comment:

- ★ It was suggested that the documents be changed to have a maximum number of events per season rather than an open event season.
- ★ An inquiry was made about extra money for clean up purposes. Ms. Israel explained that ample trash containers have been made available and that 15 new maintenance positions have been added at a cost of \$625,000.
- ★ An inquiry was made about the possibility of a lawsuit being filed by Wolfgang Puck in relation to their application for a full liquor license at the Observatory. Mr. Mathews responded that this is the first time he heard of this matter. He reiterated they are working in conjunction with the Observatory.

A presentation was then made by Paul Davis, Environmental Section, and Mike Shull, Superintendent of Planning.

Mr. Davis stated that the primary purpose of CEQA is to inform the public about the environmental process on a project, for potential environmental impacts. It's also a process to consider potential environmental damages that can be avoided and requires that those methods be implemented to avoid environmental damage. CEQA process is mandated by law and allows everyone to be a part of the process, to have access to the information, to review it, and to offer comments.

Ms. Vanaman stated the Working Group lacks the technical expertise to write this chapter. Mr. Davis said if an environmental chapter would be written directly into the Master Plan, then the methodology and procedure would have to be thought out. This could mean hiring a consultant and hiring out specific technical studies. He stated the environmental chapter is not a CEQA document. He further stated the initial study check list is the very first step in the CEQA process to scope out what the issues would need to be addressed in an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Then, an actual EIR would be prepared.

Mr. Shull suggested that the check list be done at the end of the process and that they would be willing to do the check list for the Working Group.

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Ms. Vanaman asked about the diagram environmental constraints and opportunities map. Mr. Davis explained that the Master Plan should have had a full EIR attached if it was continued to completion. This would help support the initial check list to identify environmental issues. He further explained that the EIR could be amended to the Master Plan.

Ms. Vanaman asked if it would be possible for the Department to assist with writing this chapter. Mr. Shull explained that they would not re-do this chapter as it is currently too in-depth and the CEQA process would address many of the same issues and concerns. Ms. Vanaman asked for a description of a more simplified environmental chapter. Mr. Davis explained that the chapter would identify key environmental issues. Mr. Shull offered to complete the environmental check list for the Working Group once they completed their document, which would take approximately 30 to 60 days to complete. Mr. Davis also explained that once the document was completed, they would be able to determine the appropriate level of environmental review.

There was further discussion of the EIR for the Observatory as it related to the possibility of an alcohol permit being granted.

Ms. Vanaman shared that future chapters were the environmental chapter and park management. It was determined that a meeting with the General Manager for a question and answer session would take place November 14 at 5 pm at the current meeting location, and that the public was invited. Some of the issues the Working Group were interested in discussing included: clarification about monies in the Park; the role of the commission vs. Department executives; the General Manager's vision for effective management of Griffith Park; funding for finalizing the Working Group's re-draft of the Master Plan that include printing and distribution; and the General Manager's vision for the continuation of this process.

Public Comment included the following:

- ★ There is no definitive answer regarding transportation, the park will reflect transportation changes, not dictate them.
- ★ A request for a copy of the Wolfgang Puck contract
- ★ What will it take to buy out the Wolfgang Puck contract?
- ★ Nothing is wrong with the park, just maintain it.
- ★ The access plan was revised at the last minute to allow hikers and cyclists access to the Observatory, however it is not really equal, as reservations have to be made in advance.

This concluded the November 6, 2006 meeting. The next Working Group meeting will be held Monday, December 4, 2006.