



Legislation Text

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Agenda Item Wording:

Receive a project update on the status of the East Side Regional Park's (ESRP) Environmental Impact Review process and related Groundwater Recharge Capital Improvement Projects (CIP).

Deadline for Action: None

Submitting Department: Administration - CIP Engineering

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Department Recommendation:

Staff recommends that City Council receive a status report and presentation on the East Side Regional Park project's Draft Environmental Impact Report and related Groundwater Recharge Basin projects. This report and presentation are informational only and no direct action is required.

Summary:

The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the overall ESRP project has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The purpose of the DEIR is to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed Eastside Regional Park and Groundwater Recharge Projects. The DEIR is currently inside of the 45-day public review and comment period phase and was noticed in the Visalia Times Delta and to property owners and residents within 300-feet of the project site. The EIR process is expected to be completed by summer 2023. The total ESRP project area consists of approximately 286 acres, including 40 acres of planned street and infrastructure improvements. The ESRP also includes a total of seven groundwater recharge basins of which four are currently identified and in different project phases within the City's current CIP. The concept plan for the ESRP's Master Plan includes a variety of programmed uses and formed the basis of the DEIR. The Concept Plan was approved by the City in 2015. The programmed uses could be subject to further review and analysis following certification of the EIR. Future changes could be addressed afterwards as an addendum so long that proposed modifications have no significant impacts beyond those disclosed in the current document. The purpose of this item is to provide the City Council on the status of the project's EIR, the overall park, and the recharge basins currently in play.

Background Discussion:

Several years ago, the City of Visalia began proactively planning a project to develop solutions to the area's receding groundwater table. One of those projects includes the Eastside Regional Park (ESRP) & Groundwater Recharge Project. The master planned Eastside Regional Park & Groundwater Recharge Project area consists of approximately 286 acres, including 40 acres of

planned street & infrastructure improvements. The project will include Tower Street as a new arterial roadway; and improvements to Houston Avenue, Road 152, and Mineral King Avenue. The project allocated approximately 148 acres for park uses, while the dedicated groundwater recharge elements will encompass approximately 100 acres.

The basins are planned to receive allotted water deliveries to help replenish the area's groundwater. Approximately 286 acres of property bounded by Mineral King/SR 198, Road 152, Houston Avenue (SR 216), and the SCE overhead transmission towers have been acquired since 2001 for the future East Side Regional Park. Construction of park proper, the future Tower Street (Road 148) and interchange with SR 198, and groundwater recharge facilities will be within the footprint area.

Development of the ESRP Master Plan:

The original ESRP Team started the process to develop the project's concepts in 2015. The team subsequently developed two Master Plan Alternatives (i.e., park designs) labeled Concept A and Concept B by holding various outreach events including:

- Three community workshops
- Involvement of the Park Planning Task Force
- Meetings with Parks & Recreation Staff (recently renamed to the Community Services staff)

Those concepts were presented to the following groups to receive their feedback:

- Park Planning Task Force
- Waterways and Trails Committee
- Parks and Recreation Commission

The final presentation of Concept A and Concept B was made at Community Workshop No. 4 on June 18, 2015. Comments from all of these events were incorporated into the refined Concept A1 and Concept B1, which were then presented to the following groups:

- Park Planning Task Force
- Waterways & Trails Committee
- Environmental Committee
- Parks & Recreation Commission
- Site Plan Review Committee

On August 17, 2015, the City of Visalia Council voted to adopt Concept B1 as the ESRP Site Master Plan (Attachment 3). The park's comprehensive plan as proposed includes 139-acres of active recreational park space. Some of the park's major programmed uses include but not limited to separate lighted adult softball and youth baseball fields, soccer courts, tennis courts, pickleball courts, 3-acre dog park, multi-use trails, event and open space turf areas, parking areas, amphitheater, and community center building.

Since then, City staff has carried Concept B1 as the basis of the EIR and design of all Groundwater Recharge facilities to date.

Groundwater Basins:

The development of the East Side groundwater R=recharge project is part of the City's implementation program to manage recharge water deliveries under the water exchange agreement

with Tulare Irrigation District along with other surface water deliveries received via the Kaweah River and/or the Central Valley Project Friant-Kern Canal. The area was selected because it is upgradient of the City's groundwater, and thus is strategically located to receive the water deliveries and replenish the groundwater. Further, geotechnical analysis determined subsurface soil conditions favorable to water infiltration. During times of unprecedented storm events, the creation of these basins will also decrease stormwater flows before they reach the City's center, decreasing the potential for flooding in neighboring communities and the downtown core. Mill Creek, which bisects about midpoint of the project site, flows west through Downtown Visalia, through a FEMA flood zone. These basins will help to reduce the stormwater flow through the corridor to help reduce the flood risks. In addition, development of the park recreation features will provide access to much needed nature trails and open space in an area that currently has no parks within 1.0 mile of the site.

EIR:

The purpose of this DEIR is to inform decision-makers, representatives of affected or responsible agencies, the public, and other interested parties of the potential environmental effects that may result from implementation of the ESRP. The DEIR describes potential impacts relating to a wide variety of environmental issues; along with methods by which these impacts can be mitigated or avoided.

In 2014, the City entered into agreements with Provost and Pritchard Consulting Group and The HLA Group to create a master plan (ESRP Master Plan Concept B1 - Attachment 3) and prepare the final EIR with associated technical studies for the park and recharge portions of the property.

The remaining schedule of the EIR is as follows:

End of Public Review and Comment Period March 20, 2023

Tentative Public Hearing Dates:

City of Visalia Planning Commission June 12, 2023

City of Visalia City Council (Certify EIR/Approve Project): July 17, 2023

Following or together with the certification of the EIR the next steps include:

- Annexation of the portion of the project north of Mill Creek (118 acres) into the city limits.
- A General Plan Amendment is required requesting a change of the land use designations from Low, Medium and High Density Residential to Park.

Completion of the EIR will increase the City's opportunities for the acquirement of grant funding for either the park or recharge elements of the project. Note that in the interim the City has been successful in acquiring grant funds for the design and construction of Basins G and D requiring staff to prepare separate and individual environmental reviews (i.e., Mitigated Negative Declarations) for these projects. During that same process notice of environmental determinations were also filed for Basins E and F due to their proximity and again for grant funding purposes. Because the EIR has been delayed for various reasons, it's possible that some of the park design elements and/or programming could be revisited since approval of the original project concept. However, it is staff's recommendations that the EIR process be allowed to move forward towards completion through certification. Again, completion of environmental process will help with future funding/grant opportunities once completed. Any future changes could be addressed afterwards as an addendum so long that proposed modifications have no significant impacts beyond those disclosed in the

current document.

Fiscal Impact:

None at this time.

Prior Council Action:

- December 19, 2022 - Award of contracts for Basin G to Emmett's Excavation, Vanir Construction Management, and Moor Twining Associates for construction, construction management, material testing services, respectively. Appropriation of Funds.
- May 2, 2022 - Update of Basins F & G, Appropriation of funds for Basin G, Decline LWCF grant offer, and authorize staff to pursue grant opportunities for Basin F.
- November 2, 2020 - Receive staff presentation on the Basins F and G provide preliminary input on recreation-related amenities.
- July 20, 2020 - Adopt Resolution No. 2020-36 certifying Mitigated Negative Declaration No. 2019-73 prepared for the Green Infrastructure Grant, Eastside Regional Park Site, Detention Basins D and E Project (State Clearinghouse No. 2019129021) (Resolution No. 2020-36 required).
- June 20, 2022 - Authorization to award a sole-source professional design services contract to CWE for design of Basin D, and appropriation of funds.
- April 20, 2020 - Authorization for the City Manager to accept and execute a grant for \$1,907,244 from the Proposition 68 Green Infrastructure Program through the State of California Natural Resources Agency for groundwater recharge Basin D with habitat improvements.
- January 21, 2020 - City Council voted to award the Contract for RFP 19-20-20, Professional Design Services for ESRP Basins G & F + Amenities, to CWE, based on the amounts identified in the staff report.
- December 16, 2019 - City Council voted to award RFB 19-20-24 and authorize the City Manager to execute construction agreements related to RFB 19-20-24 for the removal of various orchards to the lowest responsible bidder, HD Matthews Demolition & Excavation, Inc., in the following amounts: 1. \$85,000 for Basin G (CP0185); 2. \$240,000 for Basin F (CP0371); located in the area surrounded by the future Tower Street, Mineral King, and Road 152.
- September 16, 2019 - City Council voted to appropriate funds for Basin G and F, as identified in that staff report, and to authorize the City Manager to execute an agreement from the Federal Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).
- June 17, 2019 - City Council voted to authorize staff to submit a grant proposal for the Prop 68 Green Infrastructure Program through the State of California Resources Agency and: approval of Resolution 2019-33.
- December 18, 2017 - City Council voted to authorize staff to submit a grant application for a Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant and approved Resolution 2017-83 for the East Side Regional Park Project.
- October 17, 2016 - City Council affirmed submission of a Proposition 1 Urban Rivers Grant application for a first phase project at the East Side Regional Park to construct groundwater recharge basin with habitat improvements for \$1,743,420 and appropriate \$1,568,708 of grant funding, if awarded, and advance appropriation of \$174,712 from 2017/18 project CP0185 "East Side Regional Park Basins" if awarded (Resolution 2016-61 required).
- August 17, 2015 - City Council received a Status Report and selected Master Plan Concept B1 as the

preferred plan for the next phase of CEQA review through the preparation of an EIR, direct staff to initiate proceedings for annexation and planning permits, and appropriate \$30,000 for associated staff time.

- June 15, 2015 - City Council received a Status Report and a Presentation of the Master Plan Alternatives for the East Side Regional Park and Groundwater Recharge Project.
- March 17, 2015 - City Council and Parks and Recreation Commission, at a joint meeting, received an update on the East Side Regional Park & Recharge Basins Project from Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group and The HLA Group.
- January 5, 2015 - Council appointed the 13 recommended members of the community to assist the Provost & Pritchard consulting team in the development of the East Side Regional Park master plan.
- November 3, 2014 - Council approved the concept of a 13 member panel of community citizens to work with the Provost & Pritchard consulting team to assist in the design of the East Side Regional Park master plan.
- September 15, 2014 - Council authorized the City Manager to execute a professional services agreement with Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group for RFP 13-14-28 - East Side Regional Park & Groundwater Recharge Project Design - in the amount of \$741,400 (\$616,100 for base services and \$125,300 for optional services)
- August 5, 2013 - Council authorized staff to issue Requests for Proposal (RFPs) to engage multiple consultants to complete the following planning and design studies for the future East Side Regional Park & Recharge Basins project: 1) Park Master Plan, 2) CEQA review including an Environmental Impact Report, and 3) Engineering Design for basins including a geotechnical study.

Committee/Commission Review and Action:

- August 11, 2020 - Parks and Recreation Commission received a status report and presentation of the fitness equipment alternatives; and provided feedback to City staff relevant to Basins F & G.
- June 2, 2015 - Waterways and Trails Committee, together with invited members of the Parks and Recreation Committee and the Environmental Committee, received a status report and a presentation of the Master Plan Alternatives and provided feedback to the City's consulting team.
- June 16, 2015 - Parks and Recreation Commission received a status report and a presentation of Master Plan Alternatives and provided feedback to the City's consulting team.
- July 1, 2015 - Park Planning Task Force received a presentation of Master Plan Concepts A1 and B1 and moved to select Concept A1 as their preferred master plan
- July 7, 2015 - Waterways and Trails Committee received a presentation of Master Plan Concepts A1 and B1 and moved to select Concept B1 as their preferred master plan.
- July 8, 2015 - Environmental Committee received a presentation of Master Plan Concepts A1 and B1 and moved to select Concept B1 as their preferred master plan.
- July 21, 2015 - Parks and Recreation Commission received a presentation of Master Plan Concepts A1 and B1 and moved to select Concept A1 as their preferred master plan.
- July 22, 2015 - Site Plan Review Committee reviewed Master Plan Concepts A1 and B1 and provided department comments. The committee issued a "revise and proceed" decision.

Recommended Motion (and Alternative Motions if expected):

I move to accept the status report and presentation for the Eastside Regional Park and Groundwater

Recharge Project.

Environmental Assessment Status:

The following CEQA documents were previously prepared for basins within the project site and are included / incorporated into the DEIR's Appendix.

- Initial Study and Notice of Determination (NOD) for a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) No. 2018-05 for Basins F & G.
- Initial Study and Notice of Determination (NOD) for a Mitigated Negative Declaration No. 2019-73 for Basins D & E

CEQA Review:

Draft Environmental Impact Report State Clearinghouse # 2014121076

Attachments:

1. ESRP Location Map
2. ESRP Site Masterplan (Concept B1)
3. Presentation