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Planning the Grand Park in Suburban Pleasanton, California

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The "grand park" design concept is often attributed to the work of Fredrick Olmsted through such projects as Central Park in New York City. Grand parks are typified by their natural settings, cultural facilities, and circulation systems that separate vehicles and pedestrians. They serve a wide variety of demographics and have become central (both in terms of physical space and cultural meaning) in the lives of many people.

In this case we describe the process (beginning in 2000) and design principles used by the City of Pleasanton, California, to plan, design, and implement a 318-acre grand park in the spirit of the City Beautiful movement. Suburban Pleasanton's ambitious vision can inspire other suburban areas to discover the opportunities and conditions under which grand parks are still possible, and the form these parks can take. The detailed analyses of the historic and existing landscape and the application of unique park planning principles suggests that Pleasanton has set a new standard for developing suburban parks within the historical context of the American grand park.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Park Concept

New York's Central Park and San Francisco's Golden Gate Park epitomize the vibrant and mature "grand park" concept that has been transforming communities for many decades. Today, they stand as timeless and dominating symbols of nature in the city. The size of these parks contributes considerably to their longevity and hierarchy among the American park form, but city parks of this size are rare. Most American cities have much smaller parks that have been dispersed and sized according to suburban development patterns.

The design principles used for Pleasanton's park planning process were drawn from the icons of American grand parks. From the late 19th century forward, grand parks have been designed and viewed as places to ameliorate the less desirable effects urban society imposes on its citizens.

Grand parks stand as timeless and dominating symbols of nature in the city. But grand parks typically have several features in addition to their dominant natural settings: cultural facilities such as museums, community centers, lakes, ponds, play fields, and a circulation system that separates vehicles and pedestrians. To be considered a grand park, most of the acreage must be dedicated to nature-inspired open space and habitat restoration. A grand park cannot be overly programmed, developed, or manicured.

The programming of grand parks must incrementally adapt to generational needs. Over the years, grand parks have become the focus of and surrounded by the people they serve, even though the original intent was to locate them in areas away from the city center. They serve a wide variety of demographics and have become centrally important in the lives of citizens.

Over time, the meaning of grand parks has deepened as society has come to recognize the links between nature and improved personal well-being and social connectivity. Open space systems now have greater significance in the manner in which planners think about parks and public spaces. Emphasis is now being placed on connecting landscapes into a single system designed for environmental re-creation, leisure, social engagement, and recreation. Aesthetic appeal has also reappeared as a high priority. Symbolism, as represented by public art interpretive design elements, further adds to the richness and entertainment value of grand parks.

Project Setting

Pleasanton is located in the San Francisco East Bay Area, approximately 30 miles southeast of San Francisco. Incorporated in 1894, the city has grown to a nearly built-out suburban community covering approximately 24 square miles in area. It presently contains a population of approximately 70,000. The median age is 40.5 years old and the median household income $113,345.

Pleasanton is a major job center in the Bay Area. Its local economy is strengthened by its location at the intersection of two interstate freeways, connection to the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) line, and adjacency to regional airport. It presently contains a work force of approximately 64,000 employees, many of which are located in large-scale business parks. The city's three largest employers include national or regional headquarters for Kaiser Permanente, Safeway, and Oracle.

The city prides itself as being an active, family-oriented community. With the help of local citizens, businesses, the development community, it has evolved a wide-range of recreational facilities and programs over the years.

Pleasanton is situated in a tree-covered valley defined by surrounding hills. These generally undeveloped hillsides create a physical and scenic backdrop that separates Pleasanton from surrounding communities and gives it an immediate visual connection to the natural environment.

The city's physical evolution between 1850 and 1970 resulted in a small-town feeling. This is evidenced by the city's historic downtown, charming turn-of-the-century homes, and abundance of street trees and other mature tree growth. Attractive business parks and residential neighborhoods also have been developed over the past 30 years that further create desirable planning and design elements.

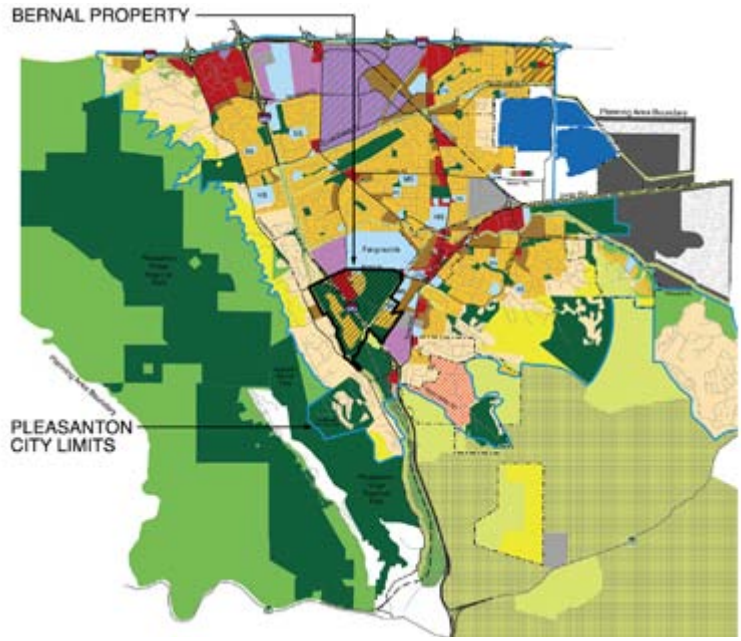

Figure 1

Location Map

Bernal Property: The Grand Park Opportunity Arises

The 318-acre Bernal Park site originally was part of the 516-acre Bernal Property owned by the San Francisco Water District and used for many years as an underground water resource. Preliminary planning and negotiations regarding the use of the full property took place between over the course of many years. The property ultimately was surplused and sold by the district to a private developer in 2001.

Prior to sale, planners representing Pleasanton, the district, and the developer undertook an intensive three-month collaborative planning process to explore the land-use planning options and negotiate a preferred plan. Following this process and a series of public hearings, the Pleasanton City Council adopted a mixed-use Phase 1 Specific Plan[1] in 2000.

The Phase I Plan called for 198 acres of private commercial and housing development and the remaining 318 acres for public park purposes. The agreed upon split between private development acreage versus park land acreage was the result of the extensive negotiations.

Development of the Phase I area necessitated the extension of public infrastructure by the developer. These extensions were also able to serve much of the remainder of the Bernal Property.

The remaining 318 acres were agreed to be dedicated to the city for the future development of the park. The dedication of such a large undeveloped piece of land in such a prime location was truly a unique and positive addition to the city. Planning for the park was then subject to the preparation of a substantially more detailed Phase II Specific Plan (see Figure 2).

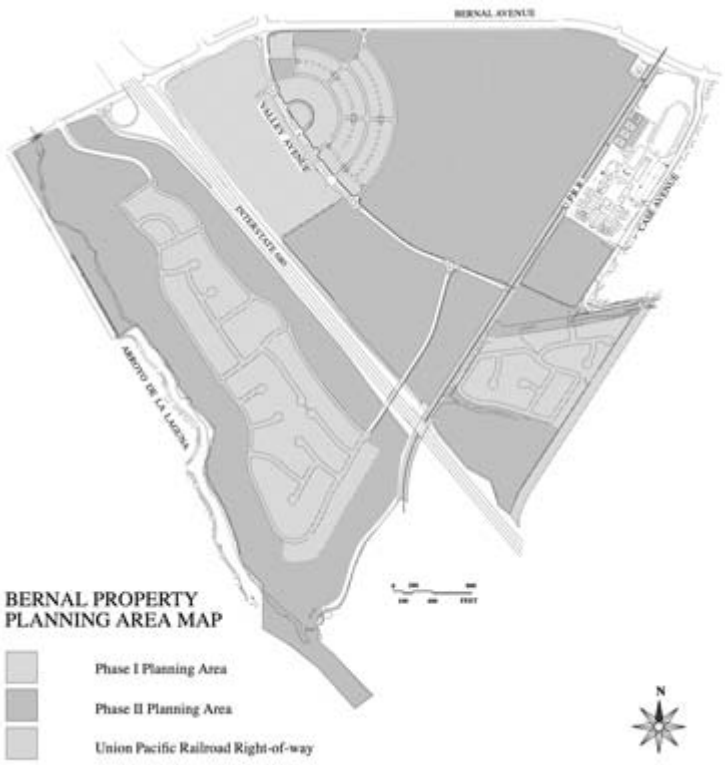

Figure 2

Bernal Property Planning Areas

The Grand Park Vision Emerges

Soon after adoption of the Phase 1 Specific Plan, the 318-acre park area was dedicated and the Phase II Park planning process began. The city council appointed an 18-member citizens task force to create a community vision for the park. The resulting vision for the long-term function and character of the park called for it to be a reflection of the environmental and cultural heritage of the local valley. The overall visual image was that of an open space/park-like setting within which public and quasi-public uses and facilities were carefully integrated. All facilities had to be flexible to meet the community's changing needs and values over time. We now describe the details of how the grand park plan design emerged, consistent with the established vision.

FACTS OF THE CASE

Design Competition

The next step in the planning process was a national design competition for Bernal Park that was funded and sponsored by the city in August 2004. Wayne Rasmussen of Rasmussen Planning, Inc. served as the city's consultant and represented the planning staff as the coordinator of this effort. Rasmussen (one of the co-authors) had been employed by the city as a principal planner for 14 years and was thus knowledgeable of the city's vision for the park and the planning process.

The purpose of the competition was to have the task force's vision translated into a conceptual site plan. William Liskamm, was commissioned to conduct the competition. M.D. Fotheringham, Landscape Architects (MDF) (the other co-author) ultimately was chosen as the winning design firm and soon after was hired to prepare the plan concept (see Figures 3 and 4).

In a statement to the competition jury, Fotheringham noted that:

"Park use in the 21st century is about redefining the shared cultural experience, not as shopping or festival events, but as connecting events. A 'park' imbues community with meaning and enchantment in the world of work. The premise of 'park' is an ecological expression; not that parks must be a re-creation of wilderness as much as a symbol of humanity's place in the bigness, the power, and the timelessness of nature. Parks and public spaces inspire our natural tendency to respond to the world of nature with awe, wonder, and amazement."

The MDF plan called for a unified landscape structure within which development is carefully integrated, resulting in a network of open spaces. This network featured a coordinated system of linkages between the built environment and oak woodlands and meadows, restored and re-created channels, ponds, vegetated storm water basins, other wetlands, trails, and protected view corridors.

Figure 3

516-Acre Competition Illustrative Plan

Figure 4

Close Up Site Plan Excerpt

A total of 22 plans were submitted from national design firms. All plans were exhibited in the city library for two weeks, giving the community time to observe and comment on them. A jury of five nationally recognized architects and landscape architects then judged the plans and made their recommendations to the city council. The local press and TV also helped to involve the community.

The design competition was widely considered to be a major success. It allowed for much greater freedom for the designers than the typical linear step-by-step task force process. Ultimately the city received a rich assortment of

concepts for consideration. The competition also allowed for the community to become actively involved in the planning process in a new and unique way. By presenting the various plans in the city library, TV, and other public places, community members could much better visualize the creative opportunities for the park in a manner that is too often absent from the more combative public planning process.

Plan Preparation and Approval Process

Wayne Rasmussen also served as the city's consulting planning coordinator for the Phase II Specific Plan project. He worked along with staff from the various departments to merge the MDF concept plan into the Phase II Specific Plan. Input also was provided through a series of individual study sessions with the city council, commissions, original park task force, local Native American (Ohlone tribe) representatives, community, and staff. A primary objective of the plan was to achieve social equity by including all elements of the community in the planning process.

The Phase II Specific Plan and environmental impact report (EIR) were prepared concurrently by Rasmussen, representing the city staff, Fotheringham, and the city's environmental consulting team. This process provided the opportunity for the environmental consultants to recommend mitigations for otherwise potentially significant environmental impacts that were then incorporated directly into the Specific Plan. The result was what is called a "mitigated plan," or a specific plan that contains the environmental mitigations within its text. For example, the presence of archaeological resources found by the consulting archaeologist resulted in the inclusion of a Native American reflective area.

The Phase II Specific Plan and EIR ultimately were approved by the council in 2006. In order to ensure that the plan was truly accepted by the community, final ratification through a vote of the Pleasanton citizens was held. More than 80 percent of the electorate voted in favor of the Bernal Park concept as presented above (see Figure 3).

Overall, numerous contributions were made to the Bernal Park plan by the city planning staff, landscape architect, planning consultant, and environmental consultants. The community provided the vision for the park while the planners assisted in the overall coordination, public process, planning concept, integration of environmental mitigations, negotiations, and preparation of planning documents.

OUTCOMES

Use of the Grand Park Design Concept

The grand park design concept was used as the basis for organizing and creating the natural setting in which the city's vision would be developed. This was accomplished primarily through: (1) the planned organization of natural plant communities, and (2) sustainability practices intended to ensure the permanent viability of the natural habitats.

The prevalent characteristic of the park plan is the total mass of tree canopies and organisms living within a clearly delineated natural environment. Eighty percent of the park area was set aside for habitat creation. The remaining 20 percent was devoted to urban agriculture, play fields, and community-serving facilities including a youth center, performing arts center, and outdoor amphitheater.

Images of the Bernal Park open space presently consist of expansive views of undeveloped farmland that are leased to local agricultural businesses. Over time, the essence of the park is to evolve with views of dense tree canopies, dominating forested edges, and meadows. Layers of vegetation types consisting predominantly of natural oak woodlands and oak savannah meadows form complex patterns perceived as wilderness.

Site Description

The Bernal Park site consists of mostly flat agricultural land surrounded by nearby steeply open hillsides. Surrounding uses include a golf course, county fairgrounds, business park, housing, and public schools. Immediate access is provided by an interstate freeway, arterial street, passenger train station, local bus stops, and regional trails.

The valley in which the park is located was once part of a settlement of Native Americans, now called the Ohlone, who came to the area approximately 4,000 years ago. Their settlements were part of the largest concentration of Native Americans in North America. Significant burial grounds and other archaeological resources have been found at the Bernal site. Their descendants look upon this place as very special, and one to be revered and celebrated.

The park site is formed by two arroyos (large creeks) creating a confluence. The dominant natural habitats include a

valley oak woodland, valley oak grassland, and riparian forest remnants.

Valley oaks typically grow on deep, well-drained alluvial soils in valley bottoms along shallow natural drainages where they can root down to permanent water supplies. Tree density decreases with the transition from lowlands to the less fertile soils of drier uplands. Shrub layers under oak groves tend to develop over time.

A lack of valley oak recruitment (generational growth) at the Bernal Property exists due to damage to acorns and seedlings resulting from cattle grazing and agriculture introduced to the region starting in the mid-1800s. Most existing stands of valley oak are from 100 to 300 years old. Few new native woodland habitats are developing naturally, thus the tree density remains low. However, with successful regeneration of valley oaks, the oak woodland is to remain the climax plant community. (See Figures 5 and 6)

Figure 5

Existing Riparian Forest Habitat

Figure 6

Existing Riparian Habitat at Seasonal Basins

Sub-Area Land-Use Plan

A sub-area land-use plan was prepared for the park (See Figure 7) dividing the 318-acre site into 16 zones. Sub-

areas were defined according to a variety of criteria, including: vehicular access, proximity to public infrastructure, existing and potential future adjacent land uses, terrain, wildlife habitat value, proximity to existing noise sources (freeway, arterial streets, railroad tracks), potential presence of archaeological materials, flood zone, and the potential for clustering park facilities. Major land uses included in the various sub-areas are summarized below and all land uses in the park are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sub Area Land Account		
Sub Area	Predominant Uses	Acreage
1	Cultural Arts Center	9.2
2	Agriculture, Open Space, Park, Youth Center	61.8
3	Agriculture, Open Space, Park	39.9
4	Fire Station, Open Space	3.3
5	Child Care, Open Space, Park	1.2
6	Agriculture, Open Space	34.0
7	Agriculture Club	13.0
8	Existing School	11.1
9	Open Space	7.9
10	Open Space, Park	17.8
11	Open Space	24.4
12	Open Space, Park, Park & Ride	5.1
13	Environmental Education, Native American Reflective Area	11.1
14	Environmental Education, Native American Reflective Area	7.6
15	Open Space	59.7
16	Agriculture Crops, Community Gardens, Open Space	10.9
TOTAL		318.0

Figure 7

Sub-Area Land Use Plan

1. Agriculture: The Bernal Property has historically been maintained in agricultural use. This use will continue in the near-term until additional park development occurs. Generally, agricultural acreage is to be gradually phased out and replaced with a variety of uses, including primarily open space as defined by native woodlands and meadows. Some permanent agriculture however is anticipated. Limited agriculture is to serve symbolic as well as functional purposes, and help to recall the early heritage of Pleasanton. It also provides an educational asset. Demonstration planting areas reflecting Pleasanton's agricultural heritage are an important feature of the plan and will include flowers, orchards, vineyards, or hops. Gardening and agricultural clubs are permitted within these areas for the cultivation, as well as the raising of livestock. Plots are planned for local restaurants to grow and showcase their own produce. The sale of off-site-grown seasonal items such as pumpkins, Christmas trees, etc. also may be included. Agricultural uses are generally restricted to sustainable farming practices. The potential use of pesticides and fertilizers must be minimized and carefully managed. Sustainable agriculture offers numerous educational opportunities to the community and to children in particular. Practicing sustainable agriculture based upon natural processes allows for hands-on lessons in the natural sciences and ecology.

2. Cultural Arts Center: One of the primary facilities planned for Bernal Park is a cultural arts center. The center is envisioned as a major gathering place, as well as the visual focal point of the park with various cultural and educational facilities for people of all ages. The architecture is to be inspiring and create a visually stimulating landmark. The cultural arts center concept consists of multifunctional art classrooms and demonstration studios that might be shared with the local school district. In addition, a public art gallery with gift shop and café, and related facilities are planned. The focus of the center is an 800-seat sub-regional indoor performing arts theatre.

3. Environmental Education Center: An environmental education center is envisioned as a means to present the structure and function of the native plant communities and wildlife habitats found at the park. The origins, growth characteristics, and associated flora and fauna are to be demonstrated through various media, suitable for both adults and children. The principles and practices of restoration, preservation, and conservation are also important educational topics to be explained.

4. Native American Reflective Area: Remnants of a Native American (Ohlone) village have been found at the site. An island-like meadow area nearly surrounded by arroyos is singled out in the plan as a place of particular archaeological significance, and is thus designated for Native American commemorative use. Site improvements call for trails with signs that tell the story of the Ohlone Tribe and a "council circle" for storytelling.

5. Open Space: The majority of land within the park is preserved as open space to be restored with native habitats,

including woodlands, meadows, wetlands, and stream corridors. The planting of native forests and other woodlands arranged in linear groves that define long meadow habitats create the structure of this landscape. The open space component of the park creates its identifying character and helps to define the settings within which the grand park design strategies evolve.

6. Park and Recreational Uses: Planned park and recreational facilities include lighted and unlighted sports fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, children's playgrounds, amphitheater, botanical garden, arboretum, public art, memorial groves and gardens, lakes and ponds, dog park, and related recreational uses and facilities.

7. Trails: Multi-use trails accommodate leisure walking, jogging, bicycling, equestrians, and access for emergency and maintenance vehicles to all major public facilities. Multi-use trails also connect to the outlying regional trail system. Secondary trails connect the multi-use trails to all other on-site pedestrian circulation systems, including sidewalks, bicycle lanes, hiking paths, garden paths, etc.

8. Youth/Community Center: A building complex to facilitate youth activities and other community social and institutional functions is planned adjacent to the sports field area. The youth center is to accommodate city groups as well as private youth clubs, such as the YMCA. The facility program was developed with substantial input from the city's Youth Committee.

Illustrative Site Plan

The basis of the Bernal Park site planning process consists of three primary components. First is the Sub-Area Land Use Plan (Figure 7), which spatially allocates areas for a variety of potential future facilities. Second is the Plant Communities Plan (Figure 8), which defines the woodland and meadow areas. Third is the Illustrative Site Plan (Figure 3), which is used in conjunction with the first two plans to define the park's overall desired design character.

Figure 8

Plant Communities Plan

More specifically, the Illustrative Site Plan demonstrates the design vision with regard to: the clustering of public facilities within the open space setting; the relative proportion of open space to developed area; and the scale and spatial relationship of open meadows to forested areas.

Plant Communities

The Bernal Park landscape structure emerges from the planting of trees in a proportion of generally 70 percent woodlands to 30 percent meadows. Tree plantings and groups of plant communities as illustrated in Figure 7 are beginning to form the meadow edges. The woods and meadows take a somewhat linear shape, tending in generally a north-south direction, following the natural historical watershed patterns of the site. This transformation of the open farmland into mature oak woodland will take many years, but the landscape structure is being established during each design phase.

The park is situated in the Northern California inland foothill and valley plant environments. Within these regional environmental zones, specific native plant communities have been identified for inclusion in the park. The woodland landscapes are composed of a valley oak woodland, valley oak forest, and foothill riparian habitats. The meadow landscapes are being cultivated as valley oak grasslands and oak savannah. Since most of these habitats do not presently exist at the site, the means of creating a habitats process of cultivation is required, as opposed to restoration or preservation. The re-creation of a predominantly oak woodland setting composed of habitats that are found on similar sites in the region is the primary objective.

The establishment of plant communities occurs in conjunction with an expansive topographic design consisting of massive mounds forming shallow valleys. The origin of this landform is a drainage pattern formed thousands of years ago on the site, remnants of which are still evident in the form of a central sand bar. The overland drainage system recalls the historic flows, facilitates drainage, and improves the quality of surface water runoff. The mounding is designed to guide surface water to flow toward the swales. In effect, this constructed topography defines the limits of the evolving natural setting since volunteer plant species seek optimum growing conditions; some plants seek wetter soil conditions and others dryer conditions.

Plantings were selected in response to the creation of these microclimate areas. Thus the cultivation of various woodlands and forests in the open space occurs in harmony with the landform system. Each of the plant communities are planted in microclimates that have unique solar orientation and water requirements similar to their natural settings. Each are also assigned to zones that are suitable for cultivation, with a particular exposure to the sun and surface and sub-surface hydrology.

The woodland and meadow compositions are complemented by the existing and planned future riparian and wetland habitats, each composed of unique native plant species. The intermittent and seasonal creeks are the remnants of historic flows that will undergo phased upgrades to improve flood control and water quality. When mature, these habitats are intended to improve water quality through a natural filtration of storm water runoff.

The open space framework defines the structure within which the grand park objectives, policies, and guidelines are implemented, resulting in the ultimate park vision. This framework more specifically accommodates settings for a wide variety of park improvements, including gardens, play areas, rest areas, and other gathering places. Public access is provided throughout the woodland settings but restricted to dedicated trails within the most natural and sensitive habitat conditions.

Public facilities are generally located within the meadow landscapes. Buildings are carefully integrated at edges between woodlands and meadows, providing an arboreal context within which the architecture emerges.

Sustainability

A primary objective of the Bernal Park is that it be a model of sustainable open space. To accomplish this, the landscape structure and function of the park emulates the natural environment. Facilities and open space amenities support the restoration of habitat, recycle site-generated products and reduce dependency on renewable resources. Each public facility project is to incorporate design, construction, and management practices that specifically conserve energy, regenerate the natural environment and reinvigorate human connections to nature. Community involvement in these efforts is crucial to the ongoing transformation of the site for years to come.

The park design is intended to give back to the environment what human activity takes away, primarily water, oxygen, and vegetation. As the woodlands and meadows mature and reach ecological balance, the rate of surface runoff decreases to the point where all precipitation is retained on site. Given the expanse of open space, another objective is to help balance off-site storm water flows by collecting and dissipating these flows on the site.

A major oak tree-planting program is planned over a long period of time. This increases the tree canopy and cools the park environs, while absorbing carbon dioxide and transpiring oxygen and humidity back into the air. An estimated 300,000 trees are expected to be planted or volunteered in the park over the next 50 years.

Successful park maintenance requires working within the patterns of the natural environment. Specific maintenance practices include on-site composition of all green waste generated at the park, and using satellite-connected irrigation control that adjusts irrigation schedules based upon hourly whether changes.

Design goals and methodologies involve the legal, technical, and artistic standards of sustainability, which at the outset included "green building" construction, water quality protection, resource conservation, and habitat creation and preservation. Implementation of these efforts includes maximizing the use of permeable pavements, low-water demanding plants, efficient irrigation distribution systems, and restoring portions of the open space to wilderness conditions. The sports field area incorporates sustainable design features, including smart irrigation control, flow-through drainage at the parking lot, and streets with bio-swale integration, and non-irrigated seasonal grasses and wildflower areas.

Recent Park Improvements

Since the approval of the two original Bernal Property plans, development has gotten off to a fast start. The private development planned for the 198-acre private area is substantially completed, and thus most of the public streets and infrastructure required to serve the park were also constructed. The formation of a naturally created waterway has been established through the park to serve as the primary new storm water drainage facility.

The first phase of the 50-acre active sports area was constructed in 2009. This consists of the highest concentration of park facilities, clustered along a new public road. Included are four baseball diamonds and picnic grounds (see Figures 9, 10 and 11). A community-sized soccer stadium and two all-weather surface soccer fields are now in the construction design phase. Design plans for a portion of the forested open space is also under way, and the 4-H Club is in the process of planning and securing funding for an agricultural club facility.

Figure 9

50-Acre Bernal Community Park Illustrative Plan

Figure 10

Phase 1 Sports Fields

Figure 11

Recent Park Improvements

Future Planning and Funding

The prioritization, planning, and review of the future development projects within the park must go through an individual public planning process over many years. The planning and design of large-scale projects are generally coordinated by city council appointed task forces. All park projects are reviewed through the city's planned unit development (PUD) process with informal review first by interested community organizations, followed by formal planning commission review and final action by the council. Community input is the foundation of the planning process.

All projects, whether completely or partially funded by the city, and all non-city funded projects within the park are prioritized and scheduled by the city council through an annual priority-setting process followed by the city's Capital Improvements Program update. The council determines whether to authorize either a task force or staff to coordinate the preparation of plans for each project in which city funding is involved.

Requests by the proponents of non-city funded projects to initiate PUD applications for sites within the park are subject to approval by the city council prior to proceeding with the preparation of PUD plans. City staff assists in the preparation of plans to ensure conformity with standards and guidelines. All land within the 318-acre park must remain under permanent ownership of the city.

Implementation Issues

Since Pleasanton is nearly a built-out city, it was fortunate that the high-quality Bernal Property open space was available for surplusing by the San Francisco Water District. It was also crucial that the generous ratio of private development acreage to park acreage could be negotiated, and that most of the infrastructure needed for the Phase I (private development) area also sufficed for use by the park.

Significant park implementation issues remain however. Due to the substantial size of the Bernal Park, it will take many years to build out. This requires an ongoing planning process that must evolve with the ever-changing needs and desires of the community. It also requires the city council to prioritize the funding and staff time in the face of citizens groups that want their pet projects prioritized first.

Because park development and maintenance costs will be considerable, the struggle to generate public and private funding will be significant. Fortunately, the current national economic downturn has not had a major impact on the timing of the park development since the city and citizen groups were previously able to fund the initial improvements.

From the late 19th century forward, grand parks have stood as timeless and dominating symbols of nature in the city. Park design and use in the 21st century can build on this long tradition and redefine the shared cultural experience as connecting events: community service, outdoor education, and mentorship. With enough dedicated space, parks can provide environmental regeneration. Public spaces can be created where spiritual, social, and environmental renewal predominates. It is Pleasanton's hope that Bernal Park will evolve as environmentally and culturally vital to this suburban city as the grand parks are to the major cities they serve.

Just as with other grand parks, Bernal Park will take decades to reach its initial point of completion. This is primarily due, of course, to its considerable size and the substantial public and private investment required. Following initial completion, the park will continuously evolve to meet the changing needs of the community over time. As a result, the assessment of outcomes is partially dependent upon the passage of time. However, substantial progress toward the development of Bernal Park has been made to date, including:

- Agreement with the San Francisco Water District and private developer to dedicate the 318-acre park site to the City of Pleasanton in conjunction with approval of the 198-acre private development area.
- Preservation of the park site as open space and recreational use under permanent ownership by the city.
- Widespread citizen involvement in the park planning process, including the assistance of an 18-member task force, national design competition, and extensive public hearing process.
- An 80 percent vote of the Pleasanton citizens in favor of ratifying the Bernal Park Plan.
- Completion of most of the streets and major infrastructure necessary to serve the park
- Completion of the first phase of the sports fields.

Funding and design progress toward the development of three additional soccer fields, open space forestation, and a 4-H Club facility.

LESSONS LEARNED

A variety of planning and design lessons were learned from the Bernal Park planning process. These will be useful for Pleasanton going forward, as well as potentially for other communities that may be contemplating the development of suburban-scale grand park.

The primary lessons resulted from: (1) understanding the community's collective desires for the ultimate park function and character; (2) uncovering the environmental opportunities for establishing the natural conditions for a park that is unique to the ecology in which it is located; and (3) integrating the community desires and ecological opportunities into a park plan that maximizes the benefits of both.

Establish a process unique to the local needs. Due to the technical nature of the environmental and design aspects of preparing a grand park plan, a unique planning process was required for the Bernal Property that turned

out to yield very positive results. This involved the use of both the task force and the greater community to establish the park vision. The vision was then communicated to the participants of the national design competition.

Consider the merits of a design competition. The design competition format allowed for much greater freedom for the design participants than the more typical linear step-by-step task force process. The 22 designs that were submitted gave the city a rich assortment of concepts from which to choose. The subsequent selection of the MDF concept and integration of the required environmental mitigations resulted in a creative and environmentally sensitive plan that accomplished the vision of the community.

Secure public support. The vote of the citizens to overwhelmingly approve the plan also turned out to be very valuable. Not only did it validate widespread support for the plan, but it also seems to have generated a long-term community commitment. The display of the design competition plans at the public library and online, and the follow-up publicity provided by the local newspapers and television station were particularly beneficial in securing public support. This education further carried over into the subsequent planning phases and development process.

Don't underestimate time and resource commitments required for grand parks. However, as may be expected, the complex Bernal Park planning process required a considerable investment by the community in terms of time, effort, and cost. The process took six years to complete and required substantial staff time. It also required considerable time from community members, city council, commissions, etc. Consultant costs to assist staff, conduct the design competition, and provide design and environmental expertise also were significant.

Build on the history, identity and ecology of the community. The many participants involved in Pleasanton's grand park design process learned a great deal about the relationship between nature, community, and design. This included an increased understanding of the history and identity of the community, as well as the dynamics of the local ecology.

Repurpose and re-create landforms, as appropriate. A variety of detailed aspects of environmental design also were learned by the participants who are now involved in implementing the park plan. These include the purpose and creation of large-scale naturally functioning landforms, the retention and utilization of storm water runoff to sustain the onsite native habitat, and the natural process by which the original ecology of the park site can be re-established.

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Note

1. In California "specific plans" are authorized by the State Government Code to serve as a land-use planning tool for local governments. Specific plans are considered to be a detailed extension of the comprehensive plan (or "general plan") for particular land areas. Plans include the location and extent of land uses, distribution, and extent of transportation and other infrastructure needed to support the planned land uses, standards, and criteria by which development is to proceed, and an implementation program necessary to carry out the plan.