



March 31, 2015

To: Menlo Park City Council, Planning Commission
cc: Parks & Recreation Commission

Dear Council Members:

Today, March 31, Council Members Ray Mueller and Peter Ohtaki asked the City Administration for a deviation in the schedule for the General Plan Process that would include, in part, a discussion of the City's public benefit policies. Friends of Bedwell Bayfront Park ask that the Council and the Planning Commission take this opportunity to explore public benefit requirements of developers consistent with the revival of private property in the M-2 Zoning District and also of the public resources of the neighborhood. Topping the list should be picking up the tab for annual costs of a full time ranger at the City's largest and only shoreline park. With the M-2 area experiencing a radical transformation, it is timely that Bedwell Bayfront Park be made a safe and inviting recreational site for the increasing influx of employees and residents.

Bedwell Bayfront Park is in trouble. It is suffering from neglect, unlike the city's other parks. In 1995 when park construction was completed, the City of Menlo Park became the steward of this 160-acre regional park. In 2015, it is time for the City to recognize the value of the city's only true open-space park and to renew the commitment made 20 years ago.

The City of Menlo Park must bring Bedwell Bayfront Park into the full family of city parks and give it the same attention and care all other city parks receive. Bedwell Bayfront Park should not be dismissed as land "over there" or "on the other side of 101", or as an old dump on the city's east side. It is a unique shoreline park with offerings that cannot be found at any other city park. The trails, views of the Bay and opportunities to view an array of water and shorebirds and other wildlife make this park a valuable and unique outdoors experience.

POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES

Menlo Park is experiencing robust economic growth due to its ability to attract businesses and commercial development to our beautiful city. With the expansion of Facebook offices and plans for 1,500 residential units, the finalization of the Gateway Hotel proposal, the St. Anton residential project, the Tarlton and the Sobrato Developments, Belle Haven will see a major increase in employee and residential



populations. Bedwell Bayfront Park should play a key role as a recreation destination for both employees of the new businesses and residents of the new housing units underway and planned, and as a selling point to potential investors.

The expense could be met via a number of financial mechanisms, such as the Public Benefit fees developers in the M-2 district are expected to offer, the annual Facebook payment, the General Fund, and an increase in the U.U.T. We urge the City Council to provide the park with secure and adequate funding, and to ensure that the maintenance contract that is up for renewal this spring includes the services of a full time park ranger.

CURRENT PARK NEEDS

Bedwell Bayfront Park needs the daily presence of a ranger who can provide the security, safety and maintenance that park visitors need and want. It is time for the City to acknowledge the value of this unique park.

In 2011, the City Council discontinued its contract with California Land Management that provided a full-time ranger at the park. The City now has contracted with a maintenance company for only basic janitorial services. This company cannot give the park the daily supervision needed to make it a safe, well maintained and welcoming public park. With no ranger or park guardian, there is no enforcement of park regulations. Car break-ins, discarded beer bottles, acts of minor vandalism, dogs off-leash, dumped construction debris and evidence of auto repair in the parking lots have become all too frequent. The increased incidence in problems at the park has been documented by the Menlo Park Police Department, observed by our Board Members and reported by visitors of the park.

SUMMARY

The present Bedwell Bayfront Park, with its proximity to the San Francisco Bay and its tidal saltmarsh habitats, is a treasure similar to well-used shoreline parks found in Sunnyvale, Mountain View and Palo Alto. The Friends of Bedwell Bayfront Park have spent close to 10 years safeguarding the 1974 mission of the park -- that it remains a "regional, passive recreation resource open to the public." (*Nov. 26, 1974 Menlo Park City Council Minutes.*)

We believe that this is the time for the City of Menlo Park to capitalize on the value and potential of this park in the revitalization of the M-2 area.

Friends of Bedwell Bayfront Park Board Members:

Allan Bedwell, Nancy Borgeson, Brielle Johnck, Chris MacIntosh, Anne Moser, Steve Schmidt, Curtis Snyder, Tate Snyder.



OUR ORGANIZATION

Friends of Bedwell Bayfront Park is a non-profit organization created in 2006 to oppose city efforts to lease out the interior of Bayfront Park for a commercial golf operation and, subsequently via Ballot Measure J, to develop professional-sized sports fields on park grounds. Our Board is made up of volunteers who, prior to these development efforts, were frequent users and dedicated supporters of the many activities as well as the peace and quiet afforded by the park's passive recreation status.

HISTORY

Bedwell Bayfront Park is the 160-acre covered remains of the Marsh Road Sanitary Landfill that began operations in 1957 on decommissioned salt-water evaporation ponds. Members of the South County Garbage and Refuse Disposal District served by the landfill were Menlo Park, Atherton, Redwood City, Woodside, Portola Valley, San Carlos, Belmont and East Palo Alto. In 1968, Menlo Park took responsibility for the landfill and its eventual post-closure maintenance. Then when it was clear that the District was running out of space and expansion into another salt pond was not a viable option, the member cities and permitting agencies opted to close the landfill and transfer garbage operations to Ox Mountain. District members supported Menlo Park's plan to create a "hilly, bay view, regional park with natural groundcover, wildlife enhancement and passive use, providing public access to the Bay, and an opportunity for people to enjoy peace and quiet."¹

PAST FINANCES

In 1987 the Disposal District's assets were formally entrusted to the City of Menlo Park for use in park construction and landfill maintenance. Park construction was completed 1995. In 2002/03, all remaining funds were transferred to a Park Maintenance Fund, and a separate Landfill Fund was created to meet post-closure costs associated with the monitoring and control of the landfill's leachate and methane gas operations. For some years, methane generated by the landfill was collected and burned to produce a marketable source of energy, yielding a small revenue stream for the city. In the last year or two, however, methane volume has been insufficient to warrant conversion.

CURRENT FINANCES

Maintenance of the landfill now depends almost solely on the \$725,000 in annual revenue from the Solid Waste Surcharge collected via Menlo Park's garbage bills. In recent years, the Park Maintenance Fund, commonly termed a sinking fund, has been supplemented only by interest earnings; its balance at the beginning of FY2014/15 was around \$600,000. Given estimated annual maintenance expenditures of some \$115,000, the fund will be exhausted in 3-5 years.