



TOWN OF TIBURON
1505 Tiburon Boulevard
Tiburon, CA 94920

Parks Open Space & Trails
Commission Special Meeting
March 29, 2016
Agenda Item: 1

STAFF REPORT

To: Parks, Open Space & Trails Commission

From: Scott Anderson, Director of Community Development
Pat Barnes, Director of Public Works/Town Engineer

Subject: Consider Recommendations to Town Council Regarding Proposed Improvements to the Trestle Berm Portion of Blackie's Pasture

BACKGROUND

A committee of interested citizens and the Tiburon Peninsula Foundation (TPF) has approached the Town with a plan for proposed improvements to the "trestle berm" portion of Blackie's Pasture. These improvements would build upon earlier work undertaken and completed by the TPF and the Belvedere-Tiburon Landmarks Society (BTLS) during the years 2011-2013. A general narrative description of the proposed work is set forth in attached **Exhibit 1**.

ANALYSIS

Prior Improvements (2011-2013)

The TPF/BTLS work was envisioned to occur in three phases, but only Phase One work has been completed to date. Completed Phase One work can be summarized as follows:

- Stabilizing trestle remnants
- Removing non-native species and weeds, primarily French broom, from the vicinity
- Minor reshaping where the berm had sustained damage or had begun to erode
- Removal of accumulated trash and debris between the trestle mound and Tiburon Boulevard
- Minor smoothing of the terrain around the berm to restore proper drainage after years of debris build-up.

Phase One work was primarily funded through a grant to TPF from the Carol Ann and [former Tiburon Mayor] Dennis Rockey Fund, with some Tiburon Public Works Department and financial support and a great deal of unpaid volunteerism (see **Exhibit 4** for the final report from TPF on this phase of work). As envisioned at that time, future phases of work by TPF and BTLS would have included the following:

Phase Two

- Irrigation, gardens, and paths; with specific activities such as extending irrigation to new planting areas such as Blackie's Gravesite (recently completed by DPW) and a new Master Gardener site
- Installing new paths to the trestle berm, installing benches at overlook positions, and adding new native plantings.

Phase Three

- Installing educational and interpretive elements, such as the "then and now" display cases already in place within the Richardson Bay Lineal Park
- Installing a master gardener interpretive station
- Installing directional signage.

Proposed Improvements

Drawings of the proposed improvements are attached as **Exhibit 2**. This work appears more costly and ambitious than Phase One work. It appears to include certain elements of the previously-proposed Phase Two and Phase Three work, such as the pathway on the berm, the benches at an overlook position, and the "then and now" informational plaques. The Ark newspaper covered the proposal in a front page story in its March 9, 2016 edition. Primary components of the proposal include the following:

- Installation of an approximately 500-foot long accessible, paved, colored concrete pathway along the top of all but the final 20 feet of the railroad berm, defined by header boards that look like rails and surrounded on both sides by gravel ballast simulating Northwestern Pacific Railroad track appearance from the late 1800's and early 1900's. This new pathway would connect with the existing paved pathway at the same elevation as the top of the berm.
- The final 20 feet of the berm nearest the timbers would be fitted with actual historic railroad track and be designed with ties and surrounded by gravel ballast to appear as genuine useable track
- Installation of benches and "then and now" informational plaques near the end of the trestle mound nearest the remaining historic timbers from the wooden trestle. No sculpture or artwork displays are proposed at this time.

The project design would need to comply with California Title 24 accessibility standards as well as with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Staff review of the preliminary drawings indicates that accessibility compliance would be feasible. The design would also need to be reviewed for user safety and reasonable measures taken to ensure that the pathway is not improperly used in potentially dangerous ways.

The project requires funding via donations to be completed and the proponents are looking at various sources. One proposed source of donations is from the sale of in-ground "donor ties". These donor ties are proposed to be milled, 8 foot long, 3 inch tall by 8 inch wide wooden timbers replicating historic railroad ties and spaced at ten foot intervals along the concrete walkway, flush with the surface. The spikes holding down the final 20 feet of actual railroad

track proposed at the end of the berm might also be offered for purchase to help fund the project. The anticipated time frame for fund-raising and project installation is unknown at this time.

General Plan Consistency

Blackie's Pasture and its vicinity are part of the western end of the Richardson Bay Lineal Park, all of which is designated "Parks & Recreation" on the Tiburon General Plan Land Use Map, and which allows development for "recreational purposes". The policy in the General Plan most germane to this specific area is Parks & Recreation Element Policy PR-6, which reads as follows:

PR-6. The area known as Blackie's Pasture (see Diagram 8.4-1) shall be retained for passive, informal recreational use.

Diagram 8.4-1 is attached as **Exhibit 3**. The proposed railroad berm improvements are consistent with this policy and with traditional park use in Tiburon in general.

Zoning Conformance

Consistent with the General Plan land use map designation, the subject area is zoned "Parks & Recreation" in the Tiburon Zoning Ordinance. Uses permitted in this zone include:

1. Public parks and the activities and structures allowed therein by rules and regulations adopted by the town council;
2. Conservation of natural resources;
3. Restoration of native habitats;
4. Wildlife sanctuaries;
5. Passive recreational uses such as hiking, picnicking, and the enjoyment of nature;
6. Improvement or installation of trails, paths or other similar improvements intended to enhance the enjoyment of nature while minimizing impacts on the natural qualities of the land.

The proposed railroad berm improvements would appear to be in conformance with these provisions, particularly items 1 and 6.

Conformance with Other Adopted Plans

Other than the General Plan, there are currently no secondary adopted Town plans covering the Blackie's Pasture area. Until its rescission by the Town Council in 2011, the Blackie's Pasture Development Plan, adopted in 1992, called for "grading out" of the railroad berm and the planting of hardwood trees in that portion of the Richardson Bay Lineal Park. That Plan was rescinded at the same time that the Council approved the Phase One work by TPF and BTLS, as had been recommended by POST.

Project Impacts

The proposed improvements, with a few exceptions such as the "then and now" displays and the benches, would largely be at grade and would have minimal visibility except from locations that

look down upon or across the trestle berm. View blockage is therefore not a major concern. The aesthetic appearance of the grass-covered berm would be altered by the installation of the concrete walkway and gravel ballast surrounding it, as well as the simulated rails, actual rails, and the informational plaques and benches. While this represents a change in the visual character of the top surface of the trestle berm, it attempts to emulate the historic appearance from roughly 1986 to 1968, and would not necessarily be adverse. The proposed improvements would invite increased public use of the trestle berm as few people currently walk upon it in its current condition. Construction activities would generate some degree of dust, noise, and general disruption to the immediate vicinity of the trestle berm but would be temporary in nature.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTICE

As of the writing of this report (March 22), no written comments have been received. Notices to approximately 190 surrounding property owners, and to approximately 45 homeowner association contacts throughout the Town, were mailed on March 17 and 18, respectively.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

Staff has preliminarily determined that the proposed amendments are exempt from further review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) on the basis that they constitute Minor Alterations to Land pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, and constitute minor alterations of existing public facilities, including topographical features, pursuant to Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) of the CEQA Guidelines. The Town Council would finalize this determination if it determines to approve the proposal.

FUTURE STEPS

Future steps would include review by the Town Council and possible referral to other boards in the discretion of the Town Council. The proposed informational plaques and any other item over three feet in height would technically require design review (staff-level) and a building permit.

If approved in concept, several issues would need to be resolved prior to start of work, including but not limited to, determination of a financially-responsible contractor and resolution with respect to ongoing maintenance responsibilities. Unlike the Phase One improvements, the proposed improvements would require occasional repair/maintenance (other than mowing and weeding) and potentially long-term replacement of components. One option is for the project sponsors to establish an endowment with the Town to cover such future costs.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that POST:

1. Hear a presentation by the Applicants.
2. Accept any public comment on the proposal.
3. Deliberate and provide comments and recommendations to the Town Council on the proposed improvements to the trestle berm area of Blackie's Pasture.

EXHIBITS

1. Project narrative received by Town of Tiburon on March 16, 2016.
2. Schematic project drawings by Holscher Architecture (2 sheets, dated 3/10/2016).
3. General Plan Diagram 8.4-1.
4. Final Report on Phase One work from Tiburon Peninsula Foundation dated 10/3/2013.