

Memo

Quarterly Report Tierrasanta Open Space Committee

April 20, 2016

Deanna Spehn, Chair

Dishwasher Pond

The January 6, 2016 meeting of the Tierrasanta Open Space Committee focused on the long-awaited report by Helix Environmental on Roadrunner Pond, otherwise known as Dishwasher Pond, located in the canyon just north of De Portola Middle School. A copy of the report is attached to this Memo. Tom Huffman, Principal Biologist for Helix, presented the report and there was extensive Q&A about the findings. The Committee members had requested that the City commission a study to on what it would take to restore the pond to its previous status as an open water pond, home to migratory waterfowl and well used by local species.

Per the study and analysis of aerial photos, the pond “was constructed in the early 1960s by building an earthen dam across a small ephemeral stream; surrounding areas were undeveloped at the time.” The concrete spillway was added in 1980. The pond is aerated and the city’s Open Space Inspector controls when and if any water is added to the pond, which is used by residents for fishing and bird watching, and provides a source of water for local wildlife.

The pond is located in the city’s Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA), which means the pond falls under the regulatory authority of the federal U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state Regional Water Quality Control Board and California Department of Fish & Wildlife. The city may or may not consider the pond to be a wetland. The report states, “Regulatory constraints over the past few years have hindered maintenance activities in the pond, resulting in accumulation of sediment and resulting encroachment of cattails and bulrush into previous open water habitat.”

To develop the plans and meet the regulatory requirements to secure all the required permits would cost an estimated \$305,200 to \$355,200, and that’s before any work would be done to actually restore the pond to an open body of water. According to Huffman, the pond is in transition because it is getting shallower, allowing cattails to take over. After the cattails come the willow trees that ultimately will replace the cattails. Right now there are willows in the area. Cattails form a natural filtration system that filter out pollutants.

The Committee has opted to not move forward on discussing the option of renovating the pond due to the excessive costs involved. In addition to the Assessment District (local property owners) would be responsible for acquiring property to mitigate for the loss of habitat in converting the pond from one riparian habitat to another.

Drought

It was reported at the November 2015 meeting of the Open Space Committee that the Tierrasanta Maintenance Assessment District (MAD) had achieved a 56% reduction in water usage.

Palm Tree Removals

In December 2015 the MAD arranged for a helicopter to remove palm trees from Shepherd Canyon, filling 18 forty-yard dumpsters. Work on this project was done by Treebeard, West Coast Arborists and Blackhawk Helicopters.

Brush Management

The city's Brush Management Team has been working in specific Tierrasanta canyons over the last few months.

Roadrunner Park (next to Jean Farb Middle School)

Boulders were installed at Roadrunner Park to try and stop people from driving onto the grass and doing wheelies, damaging the grass and plantings. Anti-graffiti paint was applied to the boulders.

Painting of a second utility box

Local Girl Scouts will start work in the next few months on painting a utility box in front of De Portola Middle School. The first Girl Scout decorated box is located in front of the Tierrasanta Library. The design, choice of colors, etc., will be approved by the Tierrasanta Open Space Committee, that received permission from the city to use colors other than just earth tones.

Tierrasanta Trails update

Laura Ball, Biologist for the City of San Diego Open Space Division, met with the Open Space Committee at its April meeting and discussed the status of the Tierrasanta Trails Plan. Helix continues to work on the biology report. Comments have been received from the federal and state regulatory agencies and city staff has responded. The final biology report with guidance for what happens to current and future trails will be finalized shortly and presented to the Tierrasanta Community Council and Planning Group for approval – because it is a planning document. The plan would then be implemented by the Tierrasanta MAD.

Removal of Invasive Species in the canyons

Kelly & Associates continue their work in the 800+ acres of open space canyons removing invasive species including fennel, mustard and eucalyptus sprouts.

Beetle damage

The canyon behind Vons in Villa Monserate has now lost three 100-foot eucalyptus in the last few months due to extensive damage from beetles. The most recent was early in April. It took West Coast Arborists all day to cut down the tree and remove it from the canyon.

Improvements to begin in front of Tierrasanta Town Center

Just in time for the Patriots Day Parade May 21st, the Tierrasanta MAD will be sprucing up the parkway between the curb and the sidewalk with colored decomposed granite, trees and drought tolerant ground cover.

East Shepherd DG Trail improvements

While the city's Water Utilities Department considers the DG path at the bottom of the East Shepherd Canyon behind De Portola Middle School to be adequate for their needs when they drive their trucks along the path checking on the status of the large sewer line under the DG, the MAD received permission to do some maintenance and filling in along the path. Thanks also to the Friends of Tierrasanta Canyons for their work installing a small footbridge.

Grant money coming to Tierrasanta!

The San Diego River Conservancy has granted San Diego Canyonlands \$42,394 to do habitat restoration of approximately 25 acres in Rueda Canyon by removing non-native invasive plant species and installing native riparian and transitional plant species. The project also will reduce sediment runoff and will filter stormwater. Funding comes from the State Water Bond passed by voters in 2014.