

Long Range Goals of Wilderness Park Master Plan

27 November 2015

Dear Editor:

The draft master plan for the Wilderness Park contains much to be applauded. It seeks to balance the concerns of various stakeholders, it recommends an enlarged ranger staff with increased duties and powers, it encourages the establishment of a robust volunteer program and it includes a resource management plan for dealing with invasive species, trail erosion and habitat restoration.

But the value of any plan depends not just on the good ideas it contains, but on their successful implementation. Countless individual decisions will be necessary in order to translate the master plan's general goals into specific actions. Determining which informal trails should be closed and which should be repaired, evaluating whether or not a particular parking policy has been successful, deciding which invasive species to eradicate and which to allow—all these, as well as unknown future problems and challenges, will confront those responsible for park operations and maintenance.

Since the master plan is meant to guide park management for more than 20 years, it is appropriate that its pages not be cluttered with the details of these kinds of specific decisions. Rather, the plan should provide a general structural framework for how to deal with problems and decisions as they arise.

Responsibility for park operations should be in the hands of a park manager—perhaps the senior ranger—rather than falling on the shoulders of already-overworked city staff. An experienced individual with appropriate background in park management could deal with day-to-day issues and also provide leadership in prioritizing the different elements in the resource management plan.

Although policy decisions would continue to be made by the Community and Human Services Commission and city staff, this would focus major responsibility in an individual who has daily, hands-on knowledge of the conditions and problems in the park.

Finally, we recommend the establishment of an advisory group of representative stakeholders, perhaps organized under the “Friends of CHWP,” which would meet periodically with the park manager or designated staff member.

As city staff and consultants work to finalize the master plan, we ask that consideration be given to these ideas for developing a stronger, more coherent governance structure for the park.

Meg Mathies

Boardmember, Claremont Wildlands Conservancy