

## **Formalize the Park Forum**

20 November 2015

Dear Editor:

The Claremont Wildlands Conservancy wishes to propose an addition to be incorporated into the CHWP Master Plan. Fortunately, the draft master plan advocates “public engagement” as one of its six guiding principles. It recognizes that public collaboration is integral to ensuring sound policy decisions.

The plan mentions the creation of a “forum” for policy decision-making that will provide opportunities for Claremonters “to contribute their knowledge, expertise, and energy to actively support park management.”

It suggests that the forum should be a group of volunteers, “Friends of the CHWP,” and, in the language of the draft, it would be a “self-organizing” entity charged with helping to execute policies and to aid rangers. Certainly, if wisely structured, this forum could provide a place where representative voices might be heard and opposing positions resolved.

But there is a problem. The draft plan stops short of articulating a route by which this forum will actually contribute to decision-making. We need a concrete process for establishing a group of representative stakeholders (neighbors, environmentalists, hikers and bikers, etc.).

We also need an organizational mechanism by which this stakeholder forum will advise the city staff and commissions that have oversight responsibilities for the Wilderness Park.

Rather than being a “self-organized” entity dependent on the energies and enthusiasms of the moment, the master plan needs to establish an actual entity of relevant stakeholders within the governance structure of the park.

We urge that this feature be spelled out in the final version of the master plan. Hopefully, this will deflect us from the paralysis that is created by a community at loggerheads.

Jill Benton

Board member, Claremont Wildlands Conservancy