



PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Meeting: September 2, 2021

Subject

Nature Play

Recommended Action

Receive a presentation on Nature Play regarding future projects and implementation and provide feedback

Background

In February of 2020, City Council adopted the Parks and Recreation System Master Plan which will provide direction for the City and Parks and Recreation Department and improvements to the parks and recreation system through the year 2040. Within the Master Plan, 22 types of community opportunities were identified for implementation throughout the parks system, as well as short- and longer-term objectives for realizing those opportunities. Nature Play is one of these 22 community goals.

Discussion

Nature play is comprised of any activity that gets children active or thinking actively outdoors. The end goal of nature play is to allow children to build skills and the ability to play without requiring parental or adult supervision. Nature play can be in any setting provided it is outdoors. The definition of nature play is ambiguous by design. Rather than restrict the scope or setting of a child's play area or equipment into "cookie-cutter" designs, nature play intends to create a space for children to experience new things while fostering creativity and imagination. Though somewhat open to interpretation, nature play is not simply an un- or under-developed field with natural features.

The City's General Plan (RPC-3.1.3) suggests that, where appropriate, nature play areas should be considered in lieu of more conventional play equipment. The Parks and Recreation System Master Plan details specific elements to be included in nature play areas as shown in Attachment A. In addition to the various elements listed there, children's gardens to be implemented at satellite community gardens would also meet the parameters for nature play. In addition, the Master Plan stipulates that any

playgrounds near the end of their lifecycle would be good candidates for replacement with nature play components.

Master Plan guidance indicates the City should first pilot a nature play site to ensure community desire and proper execution. Two current Capital Improvement Project (CIP) locations are potential candidates for the addition of nature play and could make good pilot sites: Memorial Park and Lawrence-Mitty. The playground equipment replacement project is another current CIP that could be considered as a viable option for the pilot site.

Some additional considerations the City will need to keep in mind moving forward are the increased maintenance requirements and potential liability concerns that are intrinsic to new features such as this.

Sustainability Impact

No sustainability impact.

Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact.

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Approved for Submission by: Joanne Magrini, Director of Parks and Recreation

Attachments:

A – Excerpt from Master Plan Appendix F – Nature Play