



London N. Breed, Mayor  
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

**Date:** December 15, 2022

**To:** Recreation and Parks Commission

**Through:** Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager  
Stacy Bradley, Director of Capital & Planning

**From:** Lauren Dietrich Chavez, Project Manager

**Subject:** McLaren Trails Priority Improvements – Conceptual Design

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## **Agenda Wording**

Discussion and possible action to approve the conceptual plan for the renovation of trails and restoration of natural features in four priority areas within John McLaren Park. Approval of this proposal by the Commission is the approval action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

## **Strategic Plan**

### **Strategy 1: Inspire Public Space**

**Objective: 1.1** Develop more open space to address population growth in high needs areas and emerging neighborhoods.

**Objective: 1.2** Strengthen the quality of existing Parks & Facilities

### **Strategy 2: Inspire Play**

**Objective 2.3** Work with partners and neighborhood groups to activate parks through organized events, activities, and unstructured play

### **Strategy 4: Inspire Stewardship**

**Objective 4.1** Conserve and strengthen natural resources

**Objective 4.2** Increase biodiversity and interconnectivity on City parkland

**Objective 4.3** Increase eco-literacy of our park users and park maintenance staff

## **Background**

### Previous Approvals and Engagement



The project design is guided by the goals for trails and paths identified in the 2017 McLaren Park Vision Plan:

- Ensure safe recreation and access
- Maintain and build on natural character
- Protect natural resources
- Clarify circulation routes

The proposed improvements build on the existing McLaren Park trail network, and align with the organizing framework and best management practices described in the McLaren Park Vision Plan, and approved by the Recreation and Parks Commission in November 2017. The organizing framework includes a hierarchy of trails, multi-use loops in both the north and south half of the park, and a thoughtful system that balances pedestrian only and bike-legal multi-use trails interior to the park.

Best management practices for trail development and maintenance include:

- Trail width standards: trails built at 3' minimum width for pedestrians only and 5' minimum width for multi-use trails with bike access;
- Trail realignment, decommissioning and habitat restoration for sustainability;
- Drainage and erosion fixes;
- Hazardous tree mitigation;
- Habitat restoration planting; and
- Wayfinding and interpretive signage.

There were four priority project areas identified in the Vision Plan because of a combination of their potential impact and the need to have a licensed contractor complete the more technical aspects of the proposed improvements in these areas. The Commission also formerly approved the prioritization of the use of 2012 Bond funding for improvements in 4 designated priority project areas, specifically the expenditure of \$2 million for trail and path improvements and \$1.5 million for the restoration of natural features.

The scope has been detailed and iteratively shared and refined through:

- More than one dozen project team site visits
- Four community trail walks (11/2019, 03/2020, 06/2022, 07/2022);
- An assessment of almost 600 trees and consultation by qualified third party arborists;
- Extensive natural and cultural resource review with the San Francisco Planning Department;
- Presentations and discussions at six community group meetings (McLaren Collaborative 11/2020, 01/2021, 09/2021, 10/2021, 10/2022 and at Sunnydale NeighborUp 05/2022);
- Multiple conversations with neighbors and stakeholders, including: the SF Urban Riders, Visitacion Valley Middle School principal, cross country race coordinators, Mercy Housing staff, and the artists for Philosopher's Way.

## Project Scope

The McLaren Trails Priority Improvements Project scope presented in this conceptual design addresses the objectives listed for each priority area\* in the Vision Plan, and also responds to more newly emergent needs and opportunities. The four priority project areas and associated proposed scopes include the following:

**1) Upper Reservoir**

- Replace asphalt path and wood steps with a sustainable natural surface trail with less steps
- New crosswalk at Shelley to connect to path and trails on west side
- Mitigate drainage problems and establish a new seasonal wetland
- Habitat restoration planting
- Repair paving on the ramp southwest of the reservoir and achieve Outdoor Recreational Access Route accessibility from the parking lot to the picnic area
- New ADA van parking space in the Upper Reservoir parking lot

**2) Shelley Loop Interior**

- Clarify trail alignments and wayfinding between points of interest, such as the amphitheater and group picnic and playground areas
- Repair trail surface erosion damage
- Improve drainage to minimize future erosion
- Convert trail impacting the creek to a spur trail with overlook and consolidate trails to increase connectivity
- Habitat restoration planting

**3) University Hill/ connection between Louis Sutter and Mansell Courts**

- Reconfigure asphalt path with steps to more sustainable multi-use trail that meets Outdoor Accessibility Guidelines  
Consolidate and reroute trails to reduce erosion and maintain or improve the integrity of the grasslands

**4) Visitacion Avenue Corridor**

- New pedestrian trail from park entry at Visitacion Avenue and Hahn Street to Visitacion Valley Middle School, along the eastern side of road
- Habitat restoration planting

*\* Note that other connectivity improvements noted in the Vision Plan for the Visitacion Avenue Corridor are incorporated into other capital projects. A new crosswalk from the middle school to the fire road trail was installed in 2021. A new sidewalk from Visitacion Avenue and Hahn Street to the middle school, and new facilities for bicycles are included in the Visitacion Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Improvements project, currently in the planning phase.*

Throughout the four priority areas, the project proposes hazardous tree removals and pruning, habitat restoration plantings, and erosion mitigation, as well as updated trailhead maps and new wayfinding and interpretive signage at key locations. The majority of consolidated and rerouted

trails will have native soil surfacing. Stabilized natural surfacing material will be used for the Upper Reservoir trail and box steps and the multi-use ribbon trail connecting Louis Sutter and Mansell Courts. Rustic fencing will border select areas of the northern edge of the University Hill grassland, and will also be used to frame two lookouts: one west of the University Hill grassland, along a new multi-use ribbon trail; and one at the northern edge of Philosopher’s Hill.

The trail improvements consist primarily of consolidating and re-routing trails in order to clarify circulation, increase accessibility, reduce erosion, and establish larger areas of contiguous habitat. Wayfinding posts and improved trail maps (that will reference Muni bus stops) will help visitors travel on their desired pedestrian or multi-use routes, more easily moving through the park and to desired locations. Access will be enhanced in three high-use areas, providing more trail length and loop routes for folks who require easy (<8%) or moderate (<10%) slopes. Hazardous tree pruning and removals near trails will increase visitor safety. Slight re-routing and improved grading of the access road, and removal of trails from the University Hill grassland will significantly reduce erosion.

Natural features restoration is focused on habitat enhancement in the University Hill grassland and the riparian zone around Grey Fox Creek, and the creation of a new seasonal wetland habitat north of the Upper Reservoir. The current poorly-graded trail and myriad social trails in the University Hill Grassland will be decommissioned, and the area restored with a variety of native bunch grasses. The project will decommission the trail that runs through Grey Fox Creek, and adjacent tree removals will remove potential hazards for volunteers and let in more light, enhancing and protecting this precious riparian habitat. The area north of the Upper Reservoir will be shaped to better capture stormwater runoff, slowing and sinking water into the hillside to feed Yosemite Creek and providing improved habitat for wildlife. The overcrowded forested area on University Hill will also be thinned as part of the new multi-use trail development.

Budget

Sources:

2012 Bond, Trails	\$ 2,000,000
2012 Bond, Restoration of Natural Features	\$ 1,500,000
Outdoor Environmental Education Grant	\$ 250,000
Habitat Conservation Fund Grant	\$ 207,000
Development Fees	\$ 50,000
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$ 4,007,000</b>

Uses:

Construction Costs, Visitacion Avenue	\$ 2,757,000
Construction Costs, Natural Resource Management Areas	\$ 500,000
Soft Costs	\$ 750,000
<b>Total Uses</b>	<b>\$ 4,007,000</b>

Schedule

Visitacion Avenue

Construction – January 2023

Open to Public – June 2023

Natural Resource Management Areas (University Hill, Shelley Loop Interior, Upper Reservoir)

Construction – Summer 2023

Open to Public – Summer 2024

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the conceptual plan for the renovation of trails and restoration of natural features in the Visitacion Avenue Corridor priority area within John McLaren Park. Approval of the improvements in the Visitacion Avenue Corridor priority area by the Commission is the approval action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

### **Supported By**

Growing Outside and Learning

San Francisco Estuary Institute

California Native Plant Society, Yerba Buena chapter

Courtney Harris, Visitacion Valley Middle School Principal

Golden Gate Audubon Society

Susan Schwartzenberg and Peter Richards, Philosopher's Way artists

### **Opposed By**

Lance Mellon

### **Attachments**

Attachment 1: Conceptual Design – Visitacion Avenue Corridor

Attachment 2: Conceptual Design – Natural Resource Management Areas

Attachment 3: Accessibility Improvements Summary

Attachment 4: Pedestrian and Multi-Use Paths Summary Plan

Attachment 5: CEQA Categorical Exemption for Visitacion Avenue Corridor

Attachment 6: CEQA Natural Resource Management Areas Project Checklist