



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

**Date:** June 5, 2019

**To:** Recreation and Park Commission  
Capital Committee

**Through:** Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager  
Toks Ajike, Director of Capital and Planning Division

**From:** Brett Desmarais, Project Manager

**Subject:** Lake Merced Trail and Restroom Conceptual Plan

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### **Agenda Wording:**

Discussion and possible action to approve the conceptual design for trail renovations, fitness equipment installation, tree work, and the installation of a prefabricated restroom at Lake Merced. Approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

### **Strategic Plan**

The project honors the Department's Strategic Plan in the following ways:

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

- Objective 1.2: Strengthen the quality of existing parks and facilities
- Objective 1.3: Steward and promote good park behavior

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

- Objective 2.2: Strengthen and promote the safety, health, and well-being of San Francisco's youth and seniors.

### **Background:**

The Lake Merced recreational area is in District 7 and operates under a unique partnership between the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), the parcel owner, and the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (SFRPD), which operates recreational programming and maintains the surrounding landscape.

A nearly 5-mile multi-use trail encircles the lake, uniting three parking lot access points at the Sunset Circle, John Muir Drive, and Lake Merced Boulevard. The multi-use trail is popular among both pedestrians and leisure cyclists and connects to Natural Areas trails leading to the lake edge and Harding Park Golf Course. The area is characterized by ecologically significant plant and animal communities and features dramatic views of a surprisingly rustic landscape within City limits.



Many elements of both the natural and built landscape have reached the end of their lifespan. Many trees are in decline and pose a safety risk to trail users, while the trail edge is crowded by fast-growing exotic shrubs. The trail is further compromised by erosion and failing retaining walls, particularly on its north side. Parcourse equipment and furnishings, such as benches, are also degraded and in need of replacement, while facilities such as portable chemical toilets are now inadequate for the number of park users.

### **Community Process:**

Through community meetings and intradepartmental input, SFRPD has identified opportunities to protect and improve natural resources, recreational programming, facilities, and infrastructure at Lake Merced. These improvements reflect findings from the 2011 SFPUC Lake Merced Watershed Report, as well as goals set forth in the Recreation and Park Department's Strategic Plan. The conceptual plan was developed through four community meetings, held on 11/03/2016, 01/12/2017, 09/13/2018, and 04/01/2019, and provided a forum for community input and review throughout an iterative planning process.

Community input was critical in identifying deficiencies with existing amenities, such as the temporary toilet facility, degraded parcourse equipment, and eroding trail edge and hillsides. Recreation and Park staff confirmed that these issues have also been leading sources of 311-related reports at Lake Merced.

An initial conceptual design was developed and then presented at the third community meeting. Improvements shown in this plan included the restoration of the pedestrian trail edge along the north side of the Lake, improved trail signage and striping, the construction of a permanent restroom structure at the Sunset Circle (which will be part of the City-wide JCDecaux restroom program), and the replacement of degraded parcourse equipment along the north side of the Lake. The community was advised during this meeting that a tree assessment was underway and that a follow-up meeting would confirm the scope of any proposed tree work.

The project's final conceptual plan was presented at the fourth community meeting, where it received overwhelming support. Project updates at this meeting included the plan to install a National Fitness Campaign Fit Court near the John Muir Drive parking lot and a confirmed number of trees to be pruned, removed, and replaced around the perimeter trail.

### **Conceptual Plan:**

The scope of improvements addresses four key areas: 1) repairs to the multi-use perimeter pathway encircling Lake Merced, and 2) the replacement of an existing portable toilet with a permanent restroom structure, 3) installation of new furnishings and fitness equipment, and 4) tree maintenance and planting.

Repairs to the soft shoulder portion of the perimeter pathway will focus on approximately 8000 linear feet of trail along the north side of Lake Merced. Improvements to the trail begin with the construction of new retaining walls, likely composed of steel soldier piles with wood lagging. It is estimated that 10 new retaining walls are required to provide shoring along the northern perimeter trail edge. These walls would have exposed heights ranging up to three feet, some of which would require barrier rails. With a stabilized edge in place, the soft shoulder would be leveled to the existing asphalt pathway using compacted engineered earthen material. In other areas, vegetation (including existing tree stumps) will be removed to allow for surface restoration and improved usability. A wood header board will be used to create a more maintainable trail edge. Localized areas of degraded asphalt will be replaced, and several curb ramps rebuilt to meet current accessibility code.

New parcours equipment will be installed on concrete pads in existing equipment locations along the trail edge. New signage and stencils painted on the asphalt pathway will be applied to minimize user conflict around the entire lake. With partnership from the National Fitness Campaign, an outdoor Fit Court will be installed near the John Muir Drive parking lot in a currently unprogrammed mulched landscape.

A new single prefabricated JCDecaux restroom will be installed at the Sunset Circle parking lot. Installation of the JCDecaux restroom will include new utility service connections (electrical, and domestic water and sewer). This restroom will be managed under the Public Works contract with JCDecaux, which will be responsible for daily maintenance of the restroom.

### **Tree Assessment and Replacement:**

In September 2018 San Francisco Recreation and Parks solicited a tree assessment for the urban forest adjacent to the approximately 4.5-mile multi-use trail that encircles Lake Merced. The urban forest in this assessment lies almost entirely within the jurisdiction of the Natural Areas Program. This assessment identifies the species, size, and health of trees with canopies that overhang or are adjacent to the multi-use trail and visitor parking lots. Trees not adjacent to these spaces were excluded from the assessment. The most common genera identified in the assessment are *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia*, *Cupressus*, and *Pinus*.

Arborist's recommendations were indicated and range from no action required to structural pruning, and, in some cases, the complete removal of trees. Recreation and Park staff conducted a field verification of these recommendations in January 2019. A total of 120 trees were confirmed as requiring removal and an additional 66 trees were identified as requiring structural pruning. Public safety concerns due to poor tree health and/or structure is the primary driver for both removal and pruning.

Removed trees will be replaced at a 2:1 ratio, yielding 240 new trees that would be planted at Lake Merced and other parks. Special attention has been given to the tree replacement plan given the sensitivity of the Natural Areas Program landscape. Proposed replacement genera include *Quercus*, *Cupressus*, *Lyonothamnus*, *Aesculus*, and *Sambucus*, with an emphasis on species native to the California Floristic Province and provenance within the area of San Francisco Bay.

### **Funding:**

Funding for the project is derived from three sources: a \$1M California State Natural Resources Agency grant secured by Assemblymember Ting, \$2M in funding from the 2012 Clean and Safe Neighborhoods Park Bond, and \$900k in 2012 Forestry bond funding. The Recreation and Park Department approved the application for the grant funds under Resolution 1710-005 on October 19, 2017. File number 180366, a Board of Supervisors resolution authorizing the Recreation and Park Department to accept and expend a General Fund Grant from the California Natural Resources Agency, was adopted on May 15, 2018.

#### Funding Sources

California Natural Resources Agency Grant	\$1,000,000
2012 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond	\$2,000,000
<u>2012 Forestry Bond</u>	<u>\$ 900,000</u>
Total Sources	\$3,900,000

#### Funding Uses

Construction / Hard Costs	\$2,760,000
<u>Soft Costs</u>	<u>\$1,140,000</u>
Total Uses	\$3,900,000

**Environmental Review:**

The project has been reviewed by the Planning Department (Case No. 2019-005877ENV) and was issued a Categorical Exemption under Class 1 – Existing Facilities, Class 3 – New Construction, and Class 4 – Minor Alterations to Land.

**Supported By:**

Supervisor Yee (San Francisco District 7)  
Assemblymember Ting (California State Assembly District 19)  
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition  
San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency

**Opposed By:**

None known

**Attachments:**

Exhibit A: Recreation and Park Commission Resolution 1710-005  
Exhibit B: Accept and Expend Resolution (File No. 180366)  
Exhibit C: Diagrams and Reference Images  
Exhibit D: Existing Condition Photos  
Exhibit E: Letters of Support  
Exhibit F: Environmental Application Determination