



Memorandum

TO: Envision 2040
General Plan Update
Task Force

FROM: Co-Chairs
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SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

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Beyond the *Greenprint*: A Larger Vision for San Jose's Parks

The proposed revision of San Jose's *Greenprint* provides ample direction for park development in specific planning districts within the city, for example, by carefully defining those areas appear "underserved" by reference to the standard employed Urban Environmental Accords. It's an implementation tool, however, and not a vision.

At our most recent task force meeting, however, several task force members decried the lack of a broader vision in the City's parks plan. Beginning with Charles Lauer, several task force members repeatedly asserted that the *Greenprint* may suffice for the City planning and funding efforts, but a General Plan requires a greater citywide vision for the future of our city's parkland.

Various formulations of that vision emerged from the discussion, but a consensus has not yet emerged. Stepping away from the room gives us the benefit of reflecting on our peers' observations and synthesizing them into a comprehensive approach.

This vision is not about a single "grand central" park, but about an integrated system of larger regional city and county parks, and on their connective issue, a comprehensive trail network. Appreciating what is unique about San Jose's green space lies in looking at the larger organism of trails and parks.

Many of us aspire for Guadalupe River Park and Gardens (GRPG) to become San Jose's "central park," and for good reason. Yet at about 250 acres, and bounded by private parcels on most sides, it will never expand to the size of many cities' "grand parks" (for example, New York's Central Park, San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, and San Diego's Balboa Park all range between 840 and 1,200 acres). While the GRPG undoubtedly possesses great potential with additional development and care, none of our City parks individually have the size, attractions, and amenities that will draw comparable numbers of residents or tourists as the grand parks of other major cities.

Our larger vision is anchored by the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens, however. With a GRPG at its center, San José boasts an extensive and growing trail network, stretching along the northern and southern stretches of the Guadalupe. Filling gaps in the Guadalupe River Trail could link the GRPG with several other city parks along the trail, from Almaden Lake Park in the south to North San Jose’s planned park at River Oaks. Tributary trails that spread from the Guadalupe River Trail to the south could connect trail-goers to larger County parks, such as Santa Teresa (via the Coyote Alamitos Creek Trail) and Almaden Quicksilver (via the Los Alamitos Creek Trail). At the north end, the Guadalupe River Trail gives walkers, runners, and cyclists an opportunity to enjoy bird-watching at the National Wildlife Refuge in Alviso, or to access the regional Bay Trail to destinations beyond the County borders.

Similarly, filling the gaps in the Coyote Creek Trail could expand the reach of park-goers via foot or bike to start in the south at a place like Hellyer County Park, Tully Community Ballfield, and Los Lagos. As it heads north, the trail might grow a westward spur toward a to-be-determined set of recreational amenities at the County Fairgrounds site, and resume north to Kelley Park, Selma Olinder, Roosevelt and Watson Park, in central San Jose, and to the several parks surrounding the San Jose Municipal Golf Course to the north.

Of course, families enjoying these parks care little whether the land lies in the ownership of the City, the County, or some state or federal agency. For that reason, our vision should extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries to link residents with all of the recreational and natural opportunities around us.

To be clear: this is not a vision for every part of this city, nor for every trail, nor for every park.

Rather, this approach prioritizes investing in larger regional parks, such as Guadalupe, Kelly, and Lake Cunningham. Smaller neighborhood parks and “pocket parks,” while appropriate in very dense urban neighborhoods, impose relatively higher maintenance and operations costs per acre that the City’s current fiscal condition make problematic. Our larger regional parks also offer more unique recreational amenities. Kelly Park features Happy Hollow Park and Zoo, the Japanese Tea Garden, and History Park. Alum Rock Park and the adjacent County Open Space Authority boast great hiking opportunities, Lake Cunningham has water slides and a renowned skate park, and visitors to Almaden Lake Park can enjoy a swim in the lake (on designated days) or a ride in a paddleboat.

As for trails, this vision places less emphasis on merely expanding trail mileage, but rather elevates the goal of filling critical “gaps” in those trails with regional park destinations. It also recognizes that trails running adjacent to only a few waterways—perhaps the Coyote, Guadalupe, Upper and Lower Silver, Bay Ridge, Penitencia, Thompson, Coyote Alamitos, Calero, Saratoga, Los Gatos, and Los Alamitos—can provide the backbone of this larger network. Linking the larger trails, such as with the conceptual Three Creeks and Hetch-Hetchy Trails, becomes paramount.

Of course, many parts of the city will not lie within a couple blocks of this large trail or park. For those neighborhoods, bike lanes and sidewalks must provide accessible connections to the larger system.

While we can endlessly debate what slick marketing term we can apply to this network of parks and trails—“San José’s Emerald Necklace” comes readily to mind—we need a compelling picture for San José’s park system. It must encourage public participation, induce private financial support, and meet the needs and aspirations of our residents. This vision, we hope, will accomplish these worthy goals.