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Plan Flowing for Downtown Creeks

By Cathy Tyson



Creek Day volunteers Photo provided

Although creeks run through the city of Lafayette and are a sensitive habitat and natural asset to the area, the city does not own them - with one exception: only Lafayette Creek near the reservoir is on city-owned land. The city is concerned about stewardship and the impact of future development on these babbling brooks.

"Without a Downtown Creeks Plan in place, opportunities for preservation and restoration of downtown creeks might well be lost," said mayor Brandt Andersson.

The Creeks Plan when complete will be part of the Downtown Specific Plan, which was adopted in 2012. The DSP was prepared to preserve the downtown character through design, and preserve the downtown's natural features, notably creeks and trees, so they contribute to the community's quality of life.

Funding was recently authorized to generate a plan that would provide a framework to ensure the preservation and restoration of these waterways, and serve the city along with homeowners and landowners for years to come.

With the city budget looking more robust, city leaders acknowledged it was a high-priority project. They approved \$150,000 to pay for a consultant in partnership with volunteer efforts to generate a preservation, restoration and development plan that will clarify a number of creek concerns: setback requirements, preserving existing trees and riparian corridors, and developing criteria for adjacent development. In addition, the plan also seeks to develop public access and prevent property damage via flooding or erosion, and identify environmental concerns.

After issuing request for proposals, and going through a selection process, Gates and Associates, a landscape architecture, urban design and land planning firm, was selected to prepare the plan. They will be working with ENGEO, a firm of engineering professionals, environmental scientists and hydrologists, and with Environmental Collaborative. The team started its geological assessments in August and should wrap up that initial part of the study in October.

Looking for input on the creeks plan, the first of a series of community workshops to brainstorm ways to preserve and celebrate downtown creeks will occur from 7 to 9 p.m. Oct. 6 at the Veteran's Memorial Hall.

The project schedule is slated to take a year to complete and will include public participation throughout. Development of concepts and options will be followed by a draft plan and implementation strategy and finally California Environmental Quality Act review before the final plan document will be produced and presented to the city council for approval.

Lafayette resident Austin Payne, a civil engineer who works for Ducks Unlimited, the world's largest waterfowl and wetlands conservation organization, is one of the seven volunteer members of the Creeks Committee. He said it is important to have a plan in place that provides consistent requirements to developers to preserve and restore the creeks.

Another interested party in the project is the Contra Costa County Flood Control District; it is responsible for the channelized, or concrete sections of creek. Those channels were installed in the 1960s, said Payne, and they are at the end of their 50-year useful life. Although it would be a challenge, he would like to see those areas restored to a more natural state. The district is aware of the situation and is interested in opportunities to improve outdated sections. It has a 50-year plan,

"From Channels to Creeks," that envisions converting concrete channels into natural systems that can safely convey flood waters. Defining goals for Lafayette's creeks via the Downtown Creeks Plan will help garner funding from potential grants to make improvements.

Creek Day This Weekend!

Now in its fourth year, family-friendly Lafayette Creek Day is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 27 at the brand new Jennifer Russell Building, formerly known as the Manzanita Room at the Lafayette Community Center, 500 St. Mary's Road. There will be opportunities to learn how drought affects creeks, and to dive in to help care for the Las Trampas Creek, along with guided hikes along the creek and giveaways.

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