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It's goats for now for Orinda Oaks Park, not cattle

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda will be proceeding to hire goats to reduce vegetation at Orinda Oaks Park for fire safety for the next year rather than cattle. The city council considered the matter which was presented to them by city manager David Biggs on Nov. 2. Biggs explained that city staff has been evaluating the options of having either goats or cattle grazing the 120-acre park to achieve a higher than minimum standard of vegetation clearance. After discussion, the council unanimously agreed to a one-year pilot goat grazing project. Biggs explained that in either case, the public would still have access to the trails that cross the property. Cattle would be present for most of the year, as they are on property owned by Moraga that borders the Orinda land. Goats would be present for more limited time periods. Goats require temporary fencing that would be moved around the property as the grazing was underway, while cattle require more permanent fencing. Cattle grazing is more economically beneficial, with a 10-year projected cost of only \$90,000, while the 10-year proposed cost for using goats is \$618,000.

City staff reached out to get opinions from neighboring property owners about past experience with cattle grazing, and received 39 responses. The responses were generally more favorable to goat grazing, with over 25% favoring cattle grazing and over 69% favoring goat grazing, even given the additional expense of goat grazing.

Jim Landau wrote to Biggs to express his serious concerns about cattle grazing, having lived beside the park for over 40 years. In the past, when cattle were grazed on the land, they could not be adequately contained, and frequently broke out. He also expressed concerns about the dangers presented by cattle, and the damage done by compacting the ground. Goats, on the other hand, eat everything, including vegetation that cattle will not eat, can handle grazing on steep slopes, are more easily contained and present for shorter periods of time. Landau concluded, "We strongly feel that goats provide a better solution, reducing fuel load while disturbing the integrity of the land least. Cattle have been tried before. The residents did not like the effect. Let's try something different this time."

Biggs said that the city has one proposed contract for goat grazing, but would like to get two more. Council Member Nick Kosla asked how long it would take to do just perimeter versus the entire park but was told that wouldn't provide additional benefit over mechanical clearing. Council Member Dennis Fay said the SSTOC was concerned that using goats rather than cattle can cost a lot more over time but Council Member Inga Miller pointed out that cattle may have more latent costs, damage to people, damage to cattle, etc. Mayor Amy Worth said, "We need to look at environmental science to care for this land donated to the city."

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