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Oct. 31, 2016

RE: 11/1/16 meeting: Adoption of 2020 Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan

Dear Councilmembers,

It was with some surprise that we discovered today the existence of this item on your Nov. 1 agenda and noted its assertion of an “array of input...gathered from September to November 2015” including “more than 10 affinity groups and sixty individuals.” The Sierra Club was not among the affinity groups consulted, despite our long history of advocacy for the preservation of open spaces and natural resources in the City of San Luis Obispo, including our involvement in the creation of the Environmental Quality Task Force that led to the creation of the Natural Resources Manager position and the City’s greenbelt, and our involvement with the updates of the Conservation and Open Space Element and Land Use and Circulation Element.

Though ostensibly a plan for parks and recreation, the Strategic Plan includes “Parks, Facilities and Open Space” as a thematic area, and includes the Goal “Nurture Open Space” along with a dozen implementation actions, but no Natural Resources staff are listed on the Strategic Plan Steering Team, nor is there mention of any input from the Natural Resources Roundtable.

The objective of Goal 5.1, Nurture Open Space, is to “Implement the Open Space Maintenance Plan as well as all City adopted Conservation Plans.” When last we heard, about a year ago, your council directed staff to bring the maintenance plan back for review in a year’s time. It now appears that the Maintenance Plan is to be implemented before it is reviewed.

The goal to “Implement the Open Space Maintenance Plan as well as all City adopted Conservation Plans” omits reference to the Open Space Ordinance. This omission was a chronic problem during the creation of the O.S. Maintenance Plan. Nowhere in the Goal 5 language is there reference to the protection of natural resources and habitat as the first priority of the City’s open space ordinance and policies. A reference to “education, conservation and collaboration” presents these as co-equal measures, with the elaboration that “conservation” refers to “conservation education.” All other measures are directed at recreation, education and facilities. The plan to build a dedicated ranger station was not a recommendation of the Natural Resources Roundtable but would consume a significant portion of the Natural Resources budget for open space protection.

Nowhere in the text of the Strategic Plan is there reference to the agreed upon but yet to be implemented City policy transferring all rangers from city parks to open space areas.

We strongly recommend that your council 1) remedy the above omissions in the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, 2) withhold approval of the Strategic Plan until the promised review of the Open Space Maintenance Plan it incorporates has taken place, and 3) integrate the recommendations of the Natural Resources Roundtable with the Strategic Plan and incorporate the proceedings of the Roundtable to inform the goals and implementation measures of the Strategic plan.

Thank you for your attention to these issues,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Christie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew Christie, Chapter Director