



NOTICE OF PREPARATION

DATE: June 8, 2015

TO: State Clearinghouse, Responsible and Trustee Agencies and Interested Parties

FROM: City of Fremont, Community Development Department

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the California Nursery Historical Park Master Plan

The City of Fremont (City) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for: the California Nursery Historical Park Master Plan.

We request comments from your agency regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be addressed in the EIR. Comments should be limited to issues germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. The EIR may be used by your agency when considering subsequent permits or approvals necessary for this project. A brief description of the proposed project, its location and existing conditions is provided below.

An Initial Study (Environmental Checklist) to evaluate the potentially significant effects the project may have on the environment has not been prepared for the project.

RESPONDING TO THIS NOP: Responses to this NOP or comments regarding the scope or content of the Draft EIR must be directed in writing to:

Roger Ravenstad, Senior City Landscape Architect

City of Fremont, 39550 Liberty Street
Fremont, CA 94538

E-mail: RRavenstad@fremont.gov

Comments on the NOP must be received at the above mailing or e-mail address within 30 days of receipt of this notice, or by July 9, 2015.

Please reference the project title shown below in all correspondence.

At a minimum, responses to this NOP should focus on the potentially significant environmental effects that the project may have on the physical environment, ways in which those effects might be minimized, and potential alternatives to the project that should be addressed in the EIR. This focus aligns with the purpose of the EIR to inform the public about these factors of the project.

PROJECT TITLE: California Nursery Historical Park Master Plan

PROJECT LOCATION: 36550 Niles Boulevard, Fremont, CA, 94536; Assessor's Parcel Number(s): 507-068-006-01, 507-068-006-02, 507-068-006-004, and 507-068-002 (see attached vicinity map and site plan).

PROJECT SPONSOR: The City of Fremont is the project sponsor.

EXISTING CONDITIONS:

The project site is located at 36501 Niles Boulevard on the south side between Hillview Drive and Rancho Arroyo Parkway in the Historic Overlay District of Niles. The site is surrounded predominantly by residential development including single-family homes to the south and east and multi-family residential to the west. The General Plan land use designation for the site is Open Space – Park and Open Space – Resource Conservation. The zoning is Planned District P-71-3 in an Historic Overlay District (HOD). The 20.1 acre property is the last remnant of the original California Nursery Company, a once grand plant nursery operation spanning approximately 500 acres at its peak that brought national attention to the East Bay and was significantly associated with the evolution of the nursery industry on a statewide level. Established at the site in 1884, operations ceased in 1968 following years of downsizing, and the remaining 20.1 acres were acquired by the City of Fremont in 1972.

In addition to plants and plantings, the site also includes numerous buildings dating from the site’s use as a nursery and home site for nursery owners, including a nursery office, garden store, packing shed, president’s house, and ancillary structures including a changing room, tank house support structure, and a windmill. The site also contains the Vallejo Adobe dating from 1842/43. The public restrooms/storage and Regional Occupational Program (ROP) buildings on the site post-date the historic nursery use.

The site is currently open to the public as a park with the on-site buildings sometimes being used for educational activities or, in the past, weddings (at the adobe). While there are currently no commercial nursery activities at the site, a non-profit, Local Ecology & Agriculture Fremont (LEAF), coordinate community gardens. Another non-profit, the Math Science Nucleus (MSN), currently run several educational programs at the California Nursery Park site, are leading the effort to archive historic material for the site and nursery, and maintain the gardens around the office including the rose garden.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The City of Fremont is working with consultants to draft a Master Plan for the California Nursery Historical Park to undertake the long term planning, preservation, and enhancement of the site. The Master Plan provides for relatively light development, such that the park would remain a passive park that is not dramatically different from what it is today. The main changes include the addition of a history museum and café, and expanded use of the site for events, which would go toward funding rehabilitation of the site and historic buildings and ongoing maintenance. All historic buildings are proposed to be retained and rehabilitated except the Garden Store, which is in poor condition. The preliminary concept for the Master Plan is attached.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS: Upon initial review, the Draft EIR will address the following potential environmental effects: historic resources, noise, and traffic.

Please direct questions regarding the project or information in this NOP to: Roger Ravenstad, Senior City Landscape Architect at (510) 494-4723 or at: RRavenstad@fremont.gov



Roger Rayenstad, Senior City Landscape Architect
City of Fremont

Attachments: Figure 1: Site Location, and Figure 2: Master Plan Preliminary Concept



LEGEND

- = Project Site
- X = Study Intersection

Figure 1: Site Location (with traffic study intersections shown)
 Source: Hexagon Transportation Consultants

DESIGN CONTEXT STATEMENT

The enhanced park plan shows a greater level of development that could accommodate a broad range of programs and events. The goal of the plan is to interpret the historic nursery and add new facilities that would offer new compatible programs in the park. Rows of evergreen and deciduous trees will be introduced to reflect the rows of trees that defined the nursery for generations. These dominant bands introduce order and rhythm and defined outdoor spaces.

In this scheme all of the historic buildings are retained and restored to the period of significance (1933 - 1960) except for the Garden Store which is in very poor condition. Two currently missing historic structures would be reconstructed - part of the tall lath structure over the parking lot, and the tall water tank. We will explore the feasibility of reopening the arches of the Office Building. Five new buildings would be built to accommodate new program elements. These include a 9000 square foot museum, a cafe/restaurant, a multi-purpose/classroom building, a restroom, and a combination restroom/kitchen near the office building. The lower portion of the reconstructed water tower will be enclosed to serve as an office for the Park Manager. An existing nursery road will become the primary interpretive spine. Many of the other park features connect to this spine.

CALIFORNIA NURSERY HISTORY MUSEUM

A new one-story 9000 square foot history museum will house historic artifacts and exhibits to tell the story of California Nursery and the City of Fremont's role in California's rich agricultural heritage. This could be enlarged to twice the size by adding a story as its success and demand develops. Wide stone walkways at either side of ornamental planting beds and framed by hedges form a grand entrance to the museum and interpretive elements of the historic nursery. These beds will be an artistic interpretive display of "the character of the nursery". This space could be cordoned off to create another event venue.

VALLEJO ADOBE

The Vallejo Adobe lies at the center of the park. The existing fence will be removed or re-designed to be visually less intrusive. The gardens will be restored to more accurately reflect what a California garden would have been like. The non-historic restroom building adjacent to the adobe will be screened with shrubs.

PARKING UNDER HIGH LATH

The primary parking area remains where it is today and is accessed from Nursery Avenue. Parking for 111 cars, two ADA parking spaces and 2 bikes is provided at this location. A high lath structure, similar to the lath structures that use to shade nursery plants, is shown over the cars. The purpose of the structure is to screen the cars and more importantly to reintroduce what was once an important feature of the California Nursery. This structure could potentially integrate solar panels to generate energy for the park. Multiple paths will lead from the parking to other areas in the park.

PICNIC AREA

The space between the Boxed Tree Forest and the lath-covered parking retains a very pleasant open feeling that is nicely shaded by a canopy of tall trees. This area of the site includes a rich variety of tree species and as such is an important part of the ecosystem that will be restored and interpreted throughout the park. New plantings in this area could be added to create a permaculture demonstration area that would be overseen by a Master Gardener program. Groupings of a variety of shorter palm specimens accent this space. The plan proposes this area for family and group picnicking - a quiet activity that will benefit from the shade. A survey path weaves through this area to protect tree roots from compaction, and connects to the interpretive spine.

ARBORETUM WAY

Many of the park facilities are connected to an interpretive spine that follows the alignment of a major circulation road in the nursery. It would be anchored at one end by the President's House and at the south with a plaza and fully detailed lath structure. Interpretive material telling the history of the nursery and environs would be displayed at each end and all along the spine. Another largely paved gathering area at the mid point features the two water tanks. A secondary reverse S-curved path graciously connects the other features in the park to the spine.

OFFICE - GREAT LAWN & ROSE GARDEN

Historically the office and Great Lawn were the primary event space at the California Nursery where visitors would gather for picnics and other major events. The master plan will restore the office building and two existing restrooms in the building.

A small new building is shown behind the office to house additional restrooms and a kitchen. A new patio is shown tucked into the corner that could be used as a dance floor or as set up space for a cafe or for functions. The Changing Room would be used for storage. With these additions the Office/Great Lawn area will be

suitable as a restorable event venue. The rose and display gardens will be rehabilitated. Pathways around the Great Lawn will be improved and dense planting will be added to mitigate sound from Niles Boulevard. The middle section of the fence will be kept open for views into the garden and a transparent fence/wall will reduce vehicular noise. New shrubs will be added to buffer sound where the park abuts residences.

This area of the park would be a good place to demonstrate different types of water conserving irrigation.

NURSERY AVENUE - MAIN ENTRY

The historic main entry at Nursery Avenue will be retained. The wooden gateway sign will be restored and the security gate repaired or replaced. Gaps in the grand allée of Canary Island Date Palms will be filled and additional Date Palms will be added to extend this feature to the southern park boundary.

At the end of Nursery Avenue in the southwest corner of the park there is space for a prominent element that would provide a focal point for visitors as they enter the park.

CAFE & PARKING

A new cafe is shown at the park entry with an outdoor terrace and designated parking immediately adjacent to the cafe.

NORTHEAST CORNER - SECONDARY ENTRY

Additional parking is shown along the east property line - fitted in between the historic palms planted by John Rock. Some additional palms will be planted to reinforce this feature. This area will accommodate 32 cars and can be accessed from the secondary entry gate.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

The community gardens are located in the northeast corner adjacent to nearby parking along the east property line. The gardens will be fenced and stable from Niles Boulevard. A row of trees will provide a buffer between the garden and street.

PRESIDENT'S HOUSE - PACKING SHED - MULTI-PURPOSE/CLASSROOM BUILDING COMPLEX

Two of the oldest and most important historic buildings on the property are the President's House and the Packing Shed. Both will be retained and rehabilitated. The master plan proposes to add a third, new building to this complex. The new building is intended to be a multi-purpose space. It can be used as a classroom for students on field trips or used for an adult education program. A large terrace will provide a flexible outdoor venue associated with the multi-purpose building, which contains a bathroom and enough power and counter space for occasional use as a kitchen.

The President's House and Gardens will be used as a restorable event space. The Bangalow house will be restored to feature shrubs and perennials from the historic period. The Packing Shed will retain its rustic open shed character and will be used to house the historic pick-up trucks and other machinery used at the California Nursery.

The open space enclosed between the President's House, the Packing Shed and the new multi-purpose building will be used as an overflow outdoor area for events taking place in any of these buildings. Small events could be located in one building and large events could use all three buildings, and the entire central space defined by them.

LONG MEADOW & WATER TOWERS

A large open space is shown between the Packing Shed and historic orchard. This is a flexible space that could be used for informal gatherings associated with other park activities, or it could be used for overflow parking for occasional large events.

The existing water tower base will be stabilized with a replacement water tank. The second, high water tower and tank will be reconstructed based on available historic photos. The base of the new structure would be enclosed to create a one or two story office for the park manager. This iconic element could afford views from the top overlooking the park and environs.

HISTORIC ORCHARD, AMPHITHEATER, & ROP BUILDING

The historic orchard in the southeast corner of the site will be expanded and will provide a buffer between more active park uses and the adjacent residences.

An informal amphitheater oriented toward the historic orchard could be used as an outdoor classroom, for plays or for non-amplified music performances. The ROP building will be converted to an archive for historic material and will be temperature controlled.

BOXED TREE FOREST & RESTROOM

The Boxed Tree Forest is left much as it is currently. The existing boxed live oak trees and double row of yews will be retained and trees that have fallen will be replaced. The yews will be rejuvenated and are already being irrigated. The primary footpath through this area remains. This area is seen as a space for walking in the dense shade. For picnics and could be rented out for a "white table cloth" fund raising event. A new restroom building is shown to accommodate these uses. This building is also equipped with sufficient power to permit food trucks or similar to be based here.



Figure 2: Master Plan Preliminary Concept

Source: PGA Design for City of Fremont, distributed at a community workshop on September 25, 2014