

 <p style="text-align: center;">Council Communication Office of the City Manager</p>	Date:	October 25, 2010
	Agenda Item No. 34 Roll Call No. [_____] Communication No. <u>10-643</u> Submitted by: Donald M. Tripp Park and Recreation Director	

AGENDA HEADING:

Approval of a scope of services to conduct a natural resource inventory of the City’s park and open space land, including authorization for the City Manager to issue a request for proposals to conduct such work.

SYNOPSIS:

Staff recommends approval of a scope of services to conduct a natural resource inventory of the City’s park and open space land, including authorization for the City Manager to issue a request for proposals to conduct such work. The Park and Recreation Department will work with the Purchasing Division to prepare the request for proposals and issue the request in order to find a consultant to perform such work.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Amount: The cost of the inventory is estimated to be \$90,000 and is budgeted in the FY2011 Capital Improvement Budget. PKS166 CP040 PKS990000, Urban Conservation, Park Improvement, Page 26.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

At the City Council’s encouragement, the Parks and Recreation Department, as stewards of the City’s park and open space system, has sharpened its focus toward more sustainable and ecologically sound land management practices. The department has worked for many years with other City Departments, Drake University, Iowa State University, Trees Forever, the Polk County Conservation Board and other organizations to assist in these efforts. Their assistance has often been in the form of serving on the Park Board’s Urban Conservation Advisory Committee (UCAC), and providing feedback on existing and proposed projects throughout the park and open space system. The composition of the UCAC is varied and includes experts in conservation, ecology, forestry, gardening, biology, development, flooding, storm water management, landscape architecture and many other interests and areas of knowledge. Over time, the department has formed excellent working relationships with many of these experts, but in recent years, City needs have outgrown their time to help guide the City’s new philosophy toward a more sustainable and ecologically sound management of the City’s parkland and open space system. The Department’s Land Stewardship Policy calls for the Park and Recreation Department to enhance the park system by maintaining each individual property according to a plan that seeks to maximize the value of natural, cultural and recreational resources present.

One of the biggest challenges in sharpening focus to this philosophy of land management has been the lack of comprehensive baseline data in what exists ecologically throughout the parkland and open space system. When the department began looking at the proposal to borrow dirt for the Birdland levee and to add a trail connection from the Kiwanis Nature Island to McHenry Park, staff were able to detail the

proposed engineering of the project that would result in landscape changes to the park, including the removal of trees and soil, construction of a new trail and re-vegetating of the altered landscape. The area that we understood the least about was the ecological value and status of the land that would be altered by the project. Staff did not have any existing reports, data, or expertise on the existing ecological classification of the land or, how the land had been traditionally used. Some of the questions we were left answering included:

- Does the land have unique or significant ecological value in its current state?
- Could the land be restored to a more natural state?
- Is this land part of a larger connected ecosystem along the Des Moines River?
- Are there any endangered or threatened species (plant or animals that should be protected)?
- Are there any potentially historic trees that should be protected or avoided?

Ultimately, staff was able to work with experts to get the best possible information on short notice to allow staff to make a recommendation to the Park and Recreation Board and the City Council, but it was not an ideal situation and prompted staff to recommend that if the McHenry Park Trail project be approved we should undertake a natural resource inventory of the City's parkland and open space areas. This will build an inventory of the City's natural areas that can be beneficial in making decisions like this in the future. This commitment helped many individuals and groups get behind the agreement to allow the McHenry Park hillside to be altered.

Since that time, staff has worked with the Urban Conservation Advisory Committee to identify areas of study that would provide the City the most beneficial information about the City's natural areas. As a result of this work, a proposed scope of services has been identified to hire a consultant to conduct a natural resource inventory for the City's parkland and open space areas. This scope of services is attached, and includes:

- Mapping and delineating major plant communities
- Describing the composition and structure of each community
- Identifying the successional stage of the land as it is today
- Identifying areas of high erosion
- Identify large concentrations of ash trees that could be impacted by the emerald ash borer
- Identifying trees of special importance due to size or rarity or any other condition of interest
- Identifying areas of high infestations of invasive species
- Identifying areas of high biological or ecological diversity
- Identifying areas with unique passive recreation or environmental education opportunities

Also, the selected consultant will be asked to evaluate routinely mowed land within the parks and open space system that has potential to develop into a more natural state, thereby reducing mowing.

Upon completion of the study, the consultant will prepare a report of the study's findings including a series of recommendations for priority restoration areas within the parkland and open space system. Also, the consultant will provide the results of the study in a GIS ready data package that will allow the Park and Recreation Department and other City Departments easy access to the information. This will be a valuable tool in making decisions on future City management, planning and construction projects on the City's parkland and open space system.

The results of this study will have daily maintenance and management implications for the Park and Recreation Department by providing staff with a better understanding of the ecological and natural conditions of the City's park and open space land. A better understanding of this function and value will also allow staff to maintain the land with more ecological sound techniques and will also allow staff to

better plan for construction, renovation and restoration projects within the park and open space system. In addition, the consultant will review and coordinate with ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability on their upcoming Star Communities Index to ensure that work done on the natural resource inventory is compatible with the Index. This will be an interdepartmental effort including Public Works, Engineering, Community Development, Airport (as necessary), as well as Parks; and the Municipal Arborist will be expected to be an integral part of the program as soon as he/she is on board.

The results of this study will have daily maintenance and management implications for the Park and Recreation Department by providing staff with a better understanding of the ecological and natural conditions of the City's park and open space land. A better understanding of this function and value will also allow staff to maintain the land with more ecological sound techniques and will also allow staff to better plan for construction, renovation and restoration projects within the park and open space system.

In order to ensure that Park and Recreation Department staff will have an opportunity to increase their knowledge on this subject, the consultant, upon completion of the inventory and associated report will provide these opportunities by hosting a meeting to present key findings of the report including information about the most common plant communities found in the park and open space system, findings of rare or significant importance, and areas that are highly infested with invasive species. Also, the consultant will provide a tour for staff of some of these areas to provide on the ground information to supplement the information being conveyed in the study and report. This will help to ensure we can work toward improving staff skill sets toward a more sustainable and ecological land management philosophy.

Many other cities across the country have conducted similar studies of their park and open space systems. Samplings of communities that have undertaken this include:

- Portland, Oregon
- Goodhue County, Minnesota (SE part of the state)
- Mid-American Regional Council (Kansas City regional government)
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Bloomington, Minnesota
- Plymouth, Minnesota

Staff recommends approval of a scope of services to conduct a natural resource inventory of the City's park and open space land, including authorization for the City Manager to issue a request for proposals to conduct such work. After proposals are reviewed and a consultant is recommended, the contract will come back to the City Council for approval.

Staff will also make a provision in the RFP to get a cost estimate to do this inventory on Des Moines Water Works and Polk County Conservation Board property within the City of Des Moines. It will be up to each entity if they want to move forward with the inventory of their property.

At its September 28, 2010 meeting, the Park and Recreation Board received and filed the scope of services to conduct a natural resource inventory of its park and open space land.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: November 23, 2009

Roll Call Number: [09-2143](#)

Action: [Recommendation](#) to construct a trail connection to McHenry Park as part of the rebuild of the Birdland Levee. ([Council Communication No. 09-828](#)) Moved by Mahaffey to adopt. Motion Carried 6-1. Pass: Cownie.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Date: September 28, 2010

Roll Call Number: 10-078

Action: Park and Recreation Board received and filed scope of services to conduct a natural resource inventory of the City's parkland and open space

Date: November 19, 2009

Roll Call Number: 09-110

Action: Approve the recommendation of the park staff with consideration that the Army Corps of Engineers look to remove the beavers before construction starts, and ask if a complete look around the lake can be completed as part of the project and request a trail detour during construction be setup and require that the City tree policy be followed related to tree protection for the trees that will be saved during the construction process.

Date: October 27, 2009

Roll Call Number: 09-104

Action: Approve staff recommendation to construct an accessible trail connection to McHenry Park as part of the rebuild of the Birdland Levee. The trail will connect McHenry Park, the Kiwanis Nature Island and the Neal Smith trail.

Date: September 22, 2009

Roll Call Number: 09-094

Action: Receive and file McHenry Trail connection between Kiwanis Nature Island, McHenry Park and the Neal Smith trail as part of the rebuild of the Birdland levee.

Date: March 28, 2006

Roll Call Number: 06-020

Action: Approval to adopt the recommendation of the Urban Conservation Committee regarding the Park and Recreation Board Land Stewardship Policy which has been developed to assist the department in fulfilling its role to enhance the park system and other properties by maintaining each property according to a plan that seeks to maximize the value of natural, cultural and recreational resources present.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

Approval of contract with a consultant to conduct a natural resource inventory of the City's park and open space lands.

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