



County of Los Alamos

Los Alamos, NM 87544
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Council Meeting Staff Report

February 8, 2018

Agenda No.: C.
Indexes (Council Goals):
Presenters: Stephanie Nakhleh
Legislative File: 10369-18

Title

Open Space Advisory Subcommittee Report

Body

OSAS Jan 2018

In attendance: Kelly Sterna and Van Leimer from LAFD

Subcommittee members: Kevin Holsapple, Jonathan Creel, Liz Aicher, Stephanie Nakhleh, Eric Peterson.

Also: Amy Rogers from equestrian community

Chief Sterna: We did an environmental assessment with a grant from Homeland Security. Two areas have been earmarked for mitigation: North Horse Stables and Walnut Canyon. We learned these two areas might be Rocky Mountain Salamander habitat. That means we can't work on these areas with them from May to October, which is the wet season. Douglas fir is the preferred habitat for that animal so Game & Fish asked us not to take down Doug fir and to leave downed trees in place. Our contractor, an environmental consulting firm based in Durango, has been working diligently on this project. They are full of biologists, they have done the studies. We hope to move from Phase 1 (assessment) to Phase 2 (implementation) by May 1, 2018. We are going to try to complete our goals with minimal environmental impact. As far as public notice: Once Game & fish accepts the assessment, then it goes back to FEMA for final review; after that it will be published for public comment.

Kevin: what will the average person notice? LAFD: Crews will be in there with saws. Our UTV will pull any material out of ground to run through our chipper: so that will be a loud noise. There will not be trail closures. You'll see a lot of invasive species eliminated and condensed canopy opened up. We plan to eliminate ladder fuels. Trees will be limbed. It will look more open and be a lot cleaner. This will allow mature trees to grow and develop. If you need a visual, go to Station 6 by Canyon Rim trail and notice the difference. The work results in a more park-like setting.

Liz: Do you have a size limit for trees you cut down? LAFD: canopy distance matters. We leave mature ponderosa. We thin clusters of piñon. Eric has taught us what looks more nature-like: this is not a clear-cut operation, this is a hazardous-fuels-mitigation project. The concern is the undergrowth. Our biggest concern is that prominent wind is usually from south-southwest, except during cold front-then the wind pushes from north-northeast, toward homeowners, and is often accompanied by lightning.

Liz: Are you working with Nat'l Forest to clean up Rendija Canyon, Barranca Mesa, etc.? LAFD: We are on hold with them because they have a monster project in Jemez. Liz: Can we get permission to cut on some of their land, since we need to get that work done? Van: It's in discussion. Kelly: This DHS grant is a long-term project, part of forest-restoration plan. We are trying to bring in more people to help us, to be more of a regional effort, not just a countywide process. Liz: What about using volunteers? LAFD: That's sticky because of liability.

LAFD: Another portion of this project is home assessments. We have 1500 homeowners along these areas; we are contacting them and soliciting involvement in home assessment, at no cost to them. We give recommendations, we don't force anyone. This gets everyone on same page when it comes to fire protection. We may have a bad wildland-fire season coming up. I envision homeowners doing their part to prevent bad

response on our end. This town has actually seen three evacuations: 2001, 2011, and back in 1954 the Water Canyon fire also caused town evacuation. We're trying to avoid a major fire in 2021, that 10-year cycle. Three times is enough.

These home assessments are open to anyone. April 31 is Wildfire Day. We don't have a number/website up yet, but it'll be on Wildland site when it's ready. Self-reporting is helpful: if you take one of your trees down, you can report that and we have a record of it. Also we feel it might be helpful to have a friendly firefighter come out to tell people about fuel reduction around houses, this goes over better than "your weeds are unsightly."

Regular Agenda:

- 1) Trail signs: 40 signs in the ground now, 10 new ones. Issue with contractor, spelling errors. Eric armored the Bayo Canyon trail signs so they aren't so easy to get out.
- 2) Skills park is on hold until we figure out direction of Flow Trail; the grant might be used for that instead.
- 3) Flow Trail: County Council is recommending staff pursue this project. Staff is in touch with LANL, Fish & Wildlife, Game & Fish, etc. Probably same issue with Rocky Mountain Salamander as LAFD, which will limit work time. Liz: Can't we transfer Los Alamos Canyon to county so we can have Flow Trail there? Eric: LANL does not feel it's ready to be transferred. The road's washed out. They are still using facilities in that canyon for research purposes. I will be touring with David Izraelevitz to show him the Bayo route and the challenges this week. Harry Burgess and Brian Brogan are discussing next steps. We are also talking to historical society because Bayo and Hamilton are both historical roads. Kevin: So this is an internal county process that we (public/Open Space) will have no input on? Amy: And we get no vote on. Kevin: We provided some good and sensible input, will that input be taken into consideration? Amy: What about other locations that would be better in the long run, even if we have to wait? Kevin: What has changed for Council? Is the thing that's changed a willingness to spend a lot more money? Eric: We're looking at lots of options on how to bring cost down. Kevin: here's some feedback for you to take up the chain: there is considerable desire to understand what's changed. And the public would like input into any changes. Eric: Brian Brogan is writing a new RFP, with our input.
- 4) Eric: Canyon Restoration is 50% done, we'll pick over it as a group when I'm done with the draft. We're looking at various styles of retaining water to restore it as a wetland.
- 5) Eric: Still waiting on IMBA, should be any day now.