

Jomsky, Mark

From: Ann Tait <pascoalition@charter.net>
Sent: Wednesday, January 27, 2010 7:03 AM
To: Jomsky, Mark
Subject: PNC Concerns - Hahamongna Annex Plan

Mr. City Clerk:

Please distribute copies of this message to the following City of Pasadena Officials and include it in agenda packets for the February 1, 2010 meeting of the City Council:

Pasadena City Council
Pasadena Mayor
City Manager
Design Commission
Planning Commission
Transportation Advisory Commission

Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.
Sincerely,

Ann Tait
Chairperson
Pasadena Neighborhood Coalition

January 25, 2010

Pasadena City Council

Mayor Bill Bogaard

City Manager Michael Beck

Design Commission

Planning Commission

Transportation Advisory Commission

CITY HALL

175 N. Garfield Ave.

Pasadena, CA 91109

RE: Hahamongna Annex Plan Concerns

As Chairperson of the Pasadena Neighborhood Coalition (PNC) I am writing to inform you that in March 2009 the PNC began consideration of potential proposals for the Annex Plan to be added to the Hahamongna Watershed Park Master Plan.

Further debate at PNC meetings in September, November and December focused on the varying form and content of staff proposals streaming through city commissions. (summary attached)

As a result, the views of the PNC presently stand in solidarity with the recommendations of the Hahamongna Watershed Park Advisory Committee (HWPAC), the Planning Commission, the Design Commission and the Transportation Advisory Commission.

Similarly, we share their misgivings and their requests to City Council to reconcile discrepancies in staff reports before attempting a vote on the matter.

These discrepancies are not minor matters. They relate to environmental issues of long-term consequence to the city's emerging plans for open space: 1) corridors, 2) trees, 3) institutional parking, and 4) the integrity of public review.

The PNC therefore requests that City Council withhold approval of the Hahamongna Annex Plan until inconsistencies are fully understood and resolved. If this cannot be achieved to the satisfaction of City Council, HWPAC and the city's commissions, we respectfully urge City Council to direct staff to begin work on a full EIR for the Hahamongna Annex Plan.

Sincerely,

Ann Tait

PNC Summary Review, Hahamongna Annex Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS as referred by Hahamongna Watershed Park Advisory Committee (HWPAC) Chair Tim Wendler:

1. That after adoption of the Master Plan, the HWP Advisory Committee will reach out to knowledgeable entities in the management of similar facilities to strengthen the vision and mission for the environmental education center;
2. That after adoption of the Master Plan, the HWP Advisory Committee will develop recommendations for a site plan to identify the appropriate structure for management and operation of the environmental education center;
3. That the area of the Annex currently zoned PD-16 be studied for possible rezoning as Open Space, consistent with the rest of the area;
4. That the Master CUP proposal be brought before the HWP Advisory Committee for review and comment before the CUP hearing;
5. That Hahamongna be added to the Arroyo Seco Lands Ordinance;
6. That every effort be made to minimize tree removal in the Annex area (including non-natives, due to the loss of habitat in the Station Fire);
7. That the City proceed with a hard surface bikeway on the northern perimeter of the Annex area (strongly considering the use of alternatives to traditional paving, and seeking to minimize grading);
8. That the City construct two internal Annex equestrian/pedestrian walkways as recommended by the Design Commission and Friends of Hahamongna.

REVIEW:

The recommendations of the HWP Advisory Committee are in agreement with those of the Transportation Advisory Commission, the Planning Commission and the Design Commission. However there appears to be a serious conflict within the Staff Reports regarding these recommendations.

All three Commissions rejected the staff proposed Greenway corridor and supported instead a limited width bike/hiking path on the northern perimeter. The Transportation Advisory Committee stated that the recreational path should be designed in such a way that it could never become a road. (Reference Parks and Natural Resources Report of Sept 29, 2009, page 3 and 4, Planning Commission Recommendation, Design Commission Recommendation, and Transportation Advisory Commission Statement).

The serious concern is that throughout the advisory group meetings, the discussion was about a combined bike/hiking path in the northern corridor. This is necessary because JPL employees both walk and ride their bikes to work along the existing trail.

Only in the current version of the documents, released AFTER all the advisory bodies met, does the staff refer to the bike path as for bikes only.

The practical result of this is that, under their new definition not revealed during the advisory group meetings, both the bike path and the separate trail will be necessary to meet JPL's needs. This is the return of the up-to-30 foot greenway corridor, universally rejected as too wide.

Another serious conflict in the staff report concerns the removal of trees. The limited width bike/hiking path proposed by the above advisory bodies requires the removal of 4 trees. The current Annex Draft Addendum, however, call for the removal of 33 non-native trees growing in the formerly proposed road corridor. The plan is silent on tree replacement within the corridor, calling only for "habitat restoration".

When the Commissions were reviewing the Annex documents, the Initial Study said this about the trees: "it is the city's intent to align the trails in a manner that preserves as many existing trees as reasonably possible.....the city estimates that the number of trees that would be impacted...in the range of 7 – 19 trees". Initial Study, Rev. 1, p. 3-19.

Now the Initial Study states the following "the proposed Master Plan Addendum recommends removing all trees that are not native to California from the Annex site..." p. 2-23.

The practical result of this is that many mature shade trees along the trail, in the picnic area, in the Forest Service area, etc will be cut down. The entire Annex is a landscaped area with many mature non-natives that sequester carbon, provide valuable habitat, offer shade and beauty, etc. These include liquid ambers, pines, California peppers, eucalyptus, and Chinese elms, all of which are species found in other landscaped areas of the Arroyo.

Even if these are replaced, it will take decades before their replacement will provide the same benefits. A policy that removes mature landscape trees and replaces them with thirsty saplings also runs counter to the City's water conservation policies in the present extreme drought conditions. The HWP Master Plan clearly differentiates between "the stream and its associated restored habitats" and the "areas of concentrated recreational activity" on the west side of the park, such as the Annex. Neither the Arroyo Seco Public Lands Ordinance nor the Arroyo Seco Design Guidelines can for the removal of mature shade trees in the landscaped areas of the Arroyo.

Another conflict exists concerning parking for JPL. The Annex parking plan, Exhibit 3-5 does not show the 200 parking spaces to remain in the JPL East Parking Lot according to the Hahamongna Master Plan even though these spaces are within walking distance, less than one half mile from the Annex. This is significant because a lack of adequate parking could be used in the future as a justification for building a road across the Annex.

The Annex Plan and Initial Study have gone through four different versions:

- Plan First Draft dated 4/29/09;
- Revisions June 2009;
- Further Revisions – Revisions made after 6/2/09;
- Final Draft Plan dated 11/20/09.

This constant change throughout the review period has made it very difficult for the public to understand the documents and comment meaningfully upon them. Important changes were made to the Plan and the Initial Study repeatedly during the planning period as well as AFTER all the public meetings were held.

As a result, none of the advisory bodies saw the documents as they will be presented to the Council. The Plan they approved is not the Plan which Council will have before it. Additionally, the advisory bodies were all commenting on what were essentially different documents. The documents are not consistent within themselves, making it more difficult for both the public and the decision makers to understand them.

CONCLUSION by PNC:

The Pasadena Neighborhood Coalition supports the position of the Hahamongna Watershed Park Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, the Design Commission and the Transportation Advisory Commission.

Absent removal of conflicting and ambiguous sections prior to adoption, the PNC respectfully requests Council to direct staff to conduct an Environmental Impact Report instead of the more limited Initial Study so that these areas of controversy can be resolved and the community's vision for a rustic, natural Hahamongna can be realized