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\$1.2 million Kottinger Creek project gets council OK

Restoration, new bridges, meandering creek to revitalize park

by Jeb Bing

The Friends of Kottinger Creek won a six-year-long lobbying effort Tuesday, gaining a unanimous vote by the City Council to restore and rebuild the park and creek alongside Kottinger Drive at an estimated cost of more than \$1 million.

"This will truly be a wonderful development," said Mayor Jennifer Hosterman, who has been a leading supporter of the park project. "For us as a city not to safeguard and protect this site would be tragic."

The vote actually was not to proceed with building the park, but to seek bids for the project and then to determine how and if the city can afford to fund it. With four on the council expressing their enthusiasm, the Kottinger Creek advocates said they look for continued support when the final costs are known.

The wetlands restoration project would add trees and foliage to the park while also allowing the creek to flow in a meandering path uninterrupted toward downtown Pleasanton. It did just that 100 years ago, but over time developers routed much of it through culverts and trenches. The result has been a loss of wildlife in much of Kottinger Park, according to proponents of the restoration project.

The restoration projects actually started as a \$30,000 maintenance improvement effort. But when city crews moved equipment onto the site and tore out a group of 30-foot-high willow trees that line the creek, neighbors across Kottinger Drive from the creek complained to the city and formed the Friends of Kottinger Creek organization.

The council's endorsement came despite reservations by its own Parks and Recreation Commission that the restoration plans, including new bridges across the creek, was too ambitious and costly. A proposed bridge opposite Sherry Court would cost \$200,000 and another at Cabernet Court would cost \$150,000. At least one bridge would be built to accommodate park equipment, including tractor mowers and other machinery.

City manager Nelson Fialho said costs for restoring Kottinger Park have escalated due to the rising costs of steel, cement and other building materials.

"Frankly, we've been pretty unsuccessful at estimating construction costs on city projects recently because prices keep going up," Fialho said. "Right now we estimate the cost for this project at \$1.2 million, but I have no doubt that the bids will come in higher."

Bob Lane, who lives downstream of where the restoration work will take place, said the waterway is not a creek, but a drainage ditch that if dry in the summer except for seepage from the park's irrigation system.

"The \$1.2 million is a disproportionate amount of money to spend on what I think is a cosmetic workover of Kottinger Park," he said. "All that's needed is continued good maintenance."

But Cheri Pulls of the Friends of Kottinger group disagreed.

"This is an excellent plan," she said. "We've been going to the schools--both high schools and the three middle schools--and the students are absolutely thrilled. This new park will serve as an outdoor classroom and a special place for all our students."

"I'm astounded that someone would think that this natural habitat for our city is not worth \$1 million," she added.

Fialho and Public Works Director Rob Wilson said they will prepare final plans for contractors who plan to bid on the project, and then review the bids with the council as soon as they are received.

"We want to get these bid requests out right away so that we can do this project before the rainy season comes next winter," Fialho said.