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Kottinger Creek plans flowing smoothly

Project on track to restore park creek back to its natural habitat

by Dolores Fox Ciardelli

Friends of Kottinger Creek had their dream of a natural stream move closer last week when the City Council approved the concept plans for creek restoration.

Public Works Director Rob Wilson told the council that city staff has been working with Friends of Kottinger Creek and Far West Restoration Engineering since September to develop plans.

"We had two primary objectives: to restore the creek to more natural conditions and, second, to maintain use of the park," said Wilson.

He said another issue is the potential for flooding in the area as well as properties downstream. The project includes removing invasive plants, and widening and clearing the creek, and adding observation areas.

The 14.5-acre Kottinger Park was built in the 1960s along Kottinger Drive from Cabernet Court on the west to Bernal Avenue and beyond on the west. The creek, also known as St. Mary's Creek, is the main feature, as it meanders the length of the park.

Since its construction, the city has altered the creek to address maintenance problems and creek bank erosion. The creek now has storm culverts, pedestrian crossings and storm water runoff control features.

"One of the things we're talking about is a maintenance manual," said Wilson. "Once it's built, we can maintain it and keep it in its natural form."

The concept plan proposes two bridges, with stepping stones to cross a third culvert to provide access to the picnic area. But the council asked for plans to include a third bridge.

"Bridges are a better design feature but the cost is substantial," said Wilson. A bridge is estimated at \$60,000.

The total cost projected is \$850,000, which is \$515,000 over the funding already budgeted. The consultant contract is \$125,000, and construction costs are expected to be \$662,000, based on estimates by the consulting firm. When design plans are completed, it will come back to the City Council for appropriations, said Wilson.

"We will bring options to you to try to bring the cost down," he said.

Sheri Puls, a member of Friends of Kottinger Creek, who lives on Kottinger Drive, thanked the council for its action.

"I am thankful to city staff and you, and want to thank you for allowing us to be involved," said Puls, who said she is also known as "Ms. Creek."

"The plan is wonderful and you have considered all aspects of use of the creek.... Aesthetically it is going to be beautiful, maybe not right away but in a few years.... It's part of your legacy."

Friends of Kottinger Creek was formed in 2000 after residents became alarmed when the city removed five mature willow trees along the creek. Jim Wolfe, director of Parks and Community Services, said at the time that the city had been concerned about impeded creek flow.

The Friends were also unhappy with culverts and trenches that had been added by developers and city planners in recent years, which, they said, had resulted in a loss of wildlife.

The grassroots group ended up working with city officials to save Kottinger Creek from further erosion and to restore its natural habitat.

The plans were approved 4-0, with Councilman Matt Campbell absent.