

Stocklmeir orchards in Cupertino could become 'legacy farm'

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The city of Cupertino is getting ready to determine the fate of two of the last pieces of open space in the city.

On Aug. 4, city council will discuss plans for the Stocklmeir and Simms properties within McClellan Ranch Park. Both areas occupy the Stevens Creek Corridor on opposite ends of the newly renovated Blackberry Farm recreation area.

"It's one of the last undeveloped areas in the city of Cupertino, and we need to protect that area and save it for future generations to enjoy," said Julia Lamy, a city senior recreation supervisor.

In June 2008, the council tasked parks and recreation with finding future uses for the properties.

Last April, the parks and recreation commission approved separate future-use plans for the two parcels.

The commission approved a plan whereby the Stocklmeir property would become a "working legacy farm." The 5.1-acre fruit orchard and former farm would become a community hub where the land and orchard could be used for historical purposes, community education and activities.

The site, purchased by the city in 1999, currently includes the uninhabitable but historic home of notable resident Louis Stocklmeir. The city spent \$35,000 in roof repairs and general house maintenance in 2006.

Stocklmeir was the founder of the Cupertino Historical Society and one of the early advocates for Cupertino's incorporation as a city. The land is home, most notably, to a three-acre orchard featuring mostly oranges.

The land is also included in Phase 2 of the Stevens Creek Corridor project, which calls for the trail that runs from McClellan Road to Blackberry Farm to continue through the Stocklmeir orchard and empty onto Stevens Creek Boulevard. The creek itself will be realigned along the property to reduce erosion and protect a sewer main.

The fate of the property has been a concern among neighbors for nearly a decade, prompting the formation of the Stocklmeir Task Force in recent months.

The task force, a group of community members and organizations, wants to see the area's agricultural roots remain intact and is supporting the legacy farm recommendation.

"A legacy farm is more about the environment and recognizes how it got here. We're passing that appreciation on to the next generation," said Tom Dyer, a facilitator of the task force.

Dyer said that a legacy farm would be a valuable asset to the school districts for educational purposes.

Donna Austin of the Cupertino Historical Society is also excited about the possibility of students getting hands-on lessons in gardening and local history on

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the property. However, she is uncomfortable about the creek realignment and trail potentially cutting into the natural state of the orchard and land.

"It's just a little piece of the old days. It's so peaceful and it's unlike anything else around here," she said. "I want to see the land used, but not decimated." The plan for the Simms property, 3.1-acre piece of land adjacent to McClellan Ranch Park, calls for merging the parcel into the park.

The council voted in the early 1990s to keep the land as open space, and the recent recommendation states that there is great value in protecting and restoring the land in the area. The plan is to use the parcel for recreation, restoration and educational activities. Students often use the land to research and document restoration efforts and wildlife.

The city owns a home on the site. The recommendation calls for the removal of the house after the lease with the current tenant expires in early 2010. The lease brings in approximately \$24,000 in revenue to the city each year.

Mark Linder, director of parks and recreation, said at an April parks and recreation meeting that the house did not have much historical significance.

The patio in front of the home would be retained for outdoor gatherings and programs. The chain link fence at both the McClellan Road and Scenic Circle entrances would be replaced with a rail fence to fit the parcel's rustic character.

Other changes include removal of concrete slabs from the creek and its banks, planting native trees, adding a natural surface path from McClellan Road to Scenic Circle, removal of non-native planting and including signage that identifies the land as McClellan Ranch.

The city would also work with high schools and colleges in the area to conduct ecological studies and restoration efforts.

The council will review the recommendation on Aug. 4.

For more information about the upcoming Aug. 4 meeting, go to www.cupertino.org. For more information about the Stockmeir Task Force, go to www.stockmeir.info.

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