



Friends of Griffith Park

P.O. Box 27573

Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573

friendsofgriffithpark.org

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The Consultant Team
Recreation & Parks Needs Assessment
via email: LACityParksNeeds@theolinstudio.com

Hello,

Friends of Griffith Park (FoGP) is pleased to provide candid input to the Parks Needs Assessment (PNA). FoGP advocates for the park, supports the park, volunteers in the park, and provides educational activities which enrich the park experience. Our volunteer hours for each of the last five years exceeded 2,400 hours. Our community science and educational programming, in addition to our environmental activism, has earned us praise among peer nonprofits, and benefits Angelenos who cherish Griffith Park.

Cues can be taken from the PNA Phase 1 public comment summary:

1. *"Un-programmed green spaces, natural areas, and multi-use trails (paved and non-paved) are the most important OUTDOOR facilities to respondents."* These results are a resounding cry from the public for passive recreation in a natural setting. This is not a surprising result for people living in an increasingly crowded metropolis. Parks are a necessary safety valve for big cities, as Col Griffith J. Griffith said.

Yet, how much of RAP's budget is spent on protecting and preserving natural open space? A very minor fraction – and we strongly believe more attention and funds need to be redirected to this cause. Consider:

What is spent patrolling off-trail activities which damages habitat? Or posting signage that encourages good behavior? Is any work funded toward controlling invasive plants? Is RAP growing the native plants it needs to restore degraded habitat? The restored Commonwealth Nursery stands vacant. Is proper ecological advice being sought, especially as it relates to climate changes? Is there any trail management and maintenance, beyond what FoGP has received permission to undertake itself (with difficulty)?

We support a significantly larger allocation of the general fund budget to the management of natural resources, and the protection of habitat and biodiversity. Even though maintenance funding has been slashed, a larger amount of it can be directed specifically toward protecting the ecological health of natural areas. A good start would be to allocate significant expenditures for invasive flora control, a monumental problem which has exploded over the last decade in Griffith Park.

2. Overwhelmingly the most frequent one-word description of Parks and Recreation Centers is *"DIRTY."* We suggest this mostly refers to the lack of restroom maintenance and upkeep. In

Griffith Park there are several high-volume areas with no restroom, at all, which is also unacceptable (e.g. Bronson Canyon and Lake Hollywood). Fern Dell once had five public restrooms, and now has only one with a total of two stalls! Porta-pots seem to have become a permanent and disgusting substitute for restrooms in some areas. Yet, when you analyze the cost of them over years, even decades, it becomes simple math to realize public funds are what go into the toilet!

RAP needs a more robust maintenance staff to assure that our parks are clean and attractive. Some commented that the restrooms weren't open on Sundays because there was no one to clean them. Parents are reluctant to take their children to the park knowing that there is no restroom available while their child will inevitably have to pee (or worse).

The report cites millions of dollars in deferred maintenance. The longer you wait to repair something, the more difficult and costly the repair will be. Ironically, PNA Phase 1 also reports that *"Nearly two-thirds think parks are in excellent or good condition."* We disagree and find it difficult to reconcile with the *"DIRTY" comments*.

Continue with same "more parks is better" path?

This past decade, RAP has ballooned its total number of parks by 60 or more. While we understand the need to create park accessibility to all citizens, this comes with a very high cost to the upkeep of established parks. Also, most new parks do not provide the wilderness experience versus established larger parks, and especially our regional parks. We are a park poor city and more new parks would be nice, but with today's budget crunch, it makes little sense to establish more parks while the current parks are allowed to fall into decay.

The focus needs to change. Instead of planning to create more parks during the next decade, RAP needs to take proper care of the parks they already have.

For 15 years, FoGP has recognized that a RAP-LAUDS partnership for playground and field usage would be an efficient solution for expanding exercise-based recreation. We are pleased this may finally come to fruition. Efforts to add new tiny pocket parks that mostly serve this similar recreational purpose should be abandoned.

RAP is drowning in its own bureaucracy.

Park Superintendents used to be authorized to make decisions for their respective parks. After all, they are the ones with boots on the ground, know their parks well, and understand the needs of their park patrons. Now the simplest request must be sent downtown to middle management, where the request will likely be forwarded to others who may lose track of it.

A nonprofit organization that supports a park and is willing to pay for a project that will benefit the park and the public, should not have to undergo the Twelve Labors of Hercules in order to complete a project.

FoGP can cite far too many instances of our intent to improve Griffith Park becoming mired with red tape:

1. We hired a team of artists to create a mural tribute to mountain lion P-22 and Griffith Park's rich ecosystem supporting him for almost 11 years. It took two years for the artists to get the project approved and get a Right of Entry permit. One of the artists had plenty of time to have a baby before the ROE was granted. Yet with relentless persistence, we finally have a beautiful mural, and the artist has a beautiful baby.

2. Another example is FoGP's application for an LA County Safe Clean Water Program grant which could result in a \$26M project that largely benefits RAP. Because FoGP is not the property owner, we are required to get a letter from RAP, indicating that they approve or at least have no objection to the project. While the Griffith Superintendent is thrilled with FoGP's investment of time and money, a simple request for a letter from the property owner has stalled movement to the next funding stage of Design. The Catch 22 is the issue of Operation and Maintenance (O&M) once the project is completed – neither LA Sanitation nor RAP want the burden. The restoration and water capture project is something RAP could never afford, but why is it difficult for RAP management to write a letter and put it on a Commission agenda to pave a path to the Design Phase during which a compromise on O&M could be hammered out?

3. FoGP paid \$17,500 to a contractor for the removal of an abandoned LADWP water tank in 2017 to encourage RAP to remove the other four abandoned tanks. They are attractive nuisances, covered with graffiti which RAP has to constantly paint out. Kids climb on their rotting roofs which are a massive liability to the city. Peeling lead paint contaminates surrounding soil. In 2017, FoGP received a swift green light to remove the first tank, and the work was completed within weeks. Hooray! Following suit, and with bids secured by FoGP, the Superintendent gave the order to remove three of the four remaining tanks at RAP's expense, executed within months. The last one and the most visible, Tank 115, is still an eyesore seen by all who go to the Observatory or Mt. Hollywood.

Since RAP was not acting on Tank 115, FoGP offered to fund its removal in 2021 at a cost of \$43,500. We were told we'd first need an asbestos clearance report before we could go forward, which we then provided within weeks at a price tag of \$3,500. Now in 2025, we are still waiting for Commission Board action so we can proceed. After waiting for four years, however, we will need to reassess the inevitably higher price tag.

4. FoGP wanted to restore the classic Spanish tiled roof on the "comfort station" in Fern Dell. This is the style of all restrooms built in parks throughout the city in the 20s and 30s when they were politely referred to as comfort stations. In addition to the tiled roofs, they feature attractive lathed spindles over the windows.

Around 2009, the tiled roof of the Fern Dell comfort station was unsympathetically replaced with asphalt roofing. That, itself, is an architectural and historical debacle. In late 2023, RAP began a major interior remodel to convert each of the three-stalled gender-specific facilities into two single-stalled gender-neutral ADA accessible restrooms. FoGP thought this would be the ideal time to restore the Spanish tile roof on our dime; the comfort station was already closed and security fencing surrounded the site. However, management was not interested in adding the additional scope. It had to be a "separate project" for whatever reason.

Approvals, permits, a Right of Entry (ROE), and to top it all off, an inspection timeline that was impossible, made the red-tiled roof an expensive and a near endless endeavor for FoGP. We were required to have top-of-the-line under layers, which we learned of only after we had submitted the specifications which our contractor recommended.

Resolving the arcane permit timeline took a Titanic effort on the part of FoGP's president. LADBS issues permits only after the tear-off is complete. However, RAP requires contractors to have their permits before the Right of Entry (ROE) is issued. Without an ROE, the contractor cannot come on site to remove the old roof. Who thought up that timeline? Fortunately our president was working with a helpful clerk who understood the conundrum and was able to work with us to allow the necessary approval to slip through while against policy. The new tile roof looks beautiful and is again historically appropriate for the 1926 building.

The city in general, and RAP in particular, should do everything to facilitate these projects. This way, nonprofits can do even more for the park. As is, FoGP is hesitant to propose new projects and raise funds for them, knowing we may not be able to complete them.

City departments don't speak to each other:

1. RAP wisely hired a consultant who specializes in traffic mitigation to look into ways to slow speeding traffic in the park. Park roads are being used as an alternate route to avoid the notoriously congested traffic at the junction of the I-5 and the 134. A cyclist was killed on a park road by a speeding car. The consultants drew up simple and relatively inexpensive plans that could be implemented quickly. The Department of Transportation nixed the plan because it wasn't drawn to their particular specifications. RAP had talked to DOT early in the game; DOT never told them they had to use a particular style. We are still waiting for the project to go forward.

2. The LA Zoo submitted a Vision Plan that would have included realignment of a significant park road. While the Zoo is a separate city department, it is entirely within Griffith Park. The Zoo never advised our Griffith Superintendent of its plan or of the proposed road realignment. The Zoo department head could have walked to the Griffith Superintendent's office in five minutes. The Griffith Superintendent only learned of their plans when FoGP asked her about it.

City Parks deserve more funding

While the root problem is Prop 13 limitations which rob fair public funding, Los Angeles' property tax base has recently been impacted by the 2025 fires, as well as reduced assessments of commercial buildings with high vacancy rates. This translates to loss of property tax revenue for the County and respective cities. The meager Prop K income of \$25m yearly is coming to an end, and County Measure A funds allocated to RAP do not make it to regional parks, at all. Former General Manager Mike Shull made that clear years ago that Griffith Park won't see a dime.

We support a city bond measure in 2026 that directs significant annual funding for at least 20 years. This bond measure should be for parks only and include specific projects and goals. The city parks bond measure should not be combined with the LA Zoo, since it would severely

reduce the chance of it passing. The bond measure is much less controversial without the Zoo's baggage adversely affecting the outcome.

Summary

- RAP needs to put higher value on natural habitat areas, and accordingly, expend general fund money to preserve and enhance them.
- RAP needs to reduce the extent of paper shuffle and red tape required of trusted partnering NGOs and donors. A good first step would be making RAP approvals seamless, for example, from partnership section to the folks who do ROEs.
- RAP needs to reverse its crusade to centralize decision-making and rely, instead, on Superintendents who know their parks best. There is not enough staff downtown to be on top of everything. Why spend so much energy on board reports which often are approved on consent, anyway?
- RAP needs to make direct efforts to work more closely and in partnership with associated city departments.
- Float a city parks bond measure for the 2026 ballot separately of any funding measure for the LA Zoo.

FoGP appreciates the Consultant Team's interest in our comments. Our candor regarding RAP's current new era of centralized red tape is solely intended to affect change in a positive way. We are not critical of any staff members, only the processes which have evolved. We have been generous with citations to make our point. However, we are readily available for further discussion or clarification.

Sincerely,



Gerry Hans
President

About Friends of Griffith Park:

Friends of Griffith Park is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable group that promotes the enlightened stewardship of Griffith Park so it can survive and thrive well beyond the 21st century. FoGP is committed to ensuring that Griffith Park, a public park and Los Angeles' largest Historic-Cultural Monument, remain open, natural, and free to all citizens of Los Angeles.