Rapidly Transforming the Closed PG&E Rights-of-Way Into Natural, Drought-Tolerant Open Space Parks at Low Cost: Turning a Problem Into a Community Asset

DRAFT FOR COMMUNITY DISCUSSION 2026-11-1 V0.111

Executive summary

Two fenced-in rights-of-way in Cherry Chase neighborhood adjacent to Ramona Ave and Dona Ave represent over 36,000 square feet of underutilized natural open space. Neighborhood children have always loved playing in them, but concerns have been raised about access rights and liability for the City. We the undersigned residents of Sunnyvale putting forth this proposal see an opportunity to rapidly turn these plots into simple nature areas with their existing landscaping at very low cost under the same legal approach between the City and PG&E as the adjacent Greenwood Park. Doing this will immediately create community use open space while placing access on a sound legal footing and eliminating any concerns about liability for the City or PG&E. Over time, we can enhance the areas with Miyawaki Pocket Forests on the edges to demonstrate how Sunnyvale can adapt to climate change by creating compelling new parks without irrigated green lawns, and it can showcase an Agile, iterative approach to project management drawn from Sunnyvale's Silicon Valley roots that delivers benefits to the community quickly at low cost while preserving the option to make further improvements later. We propose making the Ramona Ave right-of-way plot a nature area first because it has the most usable space and like the Dona Ave plot has no PG&E infrastructure. We believe that all the necessary work to gather community input and safely open the Ramona Ave nature area can be done by community volunteers, Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation and Public Works, and PG&E with existing discretionary staff time and maintenance budgets and completed for a rapid park opening. Opening the Ramona Ave right-of-way plot in its current form as a simple park will in no way preclude future more ambitious changes because little about the site will be changed

in the park's first iteration. We then propose to later open the Dona Ave plot and enhance both plots with Miyawaki Pocket Forests and native landscaping along the edges, where trees are already present. The final version of this proposal to be submitted to the city will be the result of an open, inclusive process that has integrated neighborhood, community, and city stakeholder input from the outset.

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Location and history of the site

When the Cherry Chase neighborhood was laid out in 1953, the areas directly under the PG&E high-tension wires were reserved as PG&E rights-of-way. Initially, the rights-of-way were all open space. The two undeveloped plots discussed in this proposal, shown below, are facing:

- Ramona Ave (hereafter, the full-size “Ramona Ave plot” between Ramona Ave and Lois Ave)
- Dona Ave (hereafter, the half-size “Dona Ave plot” between Dona Ave and deeded backyard property of two Grape Ave residences)

This proposal only concerns the undeveloped fenced-in right-of-way space in these two plots. We propose no changes for the foreseeable future to the Lois Ave plot between Lois Ave and Dona Ave because it has PG&E infrastructure.

At some point in the early 1990s, City put up metal fencing around the three plots because of complaints from a single adjacent property owner about children playing on the lots. City failed to provide any advance community notice or review before making this needless and expensive change at the request of a single community member who moved away shortly thereafter. Large gates facing the streets provide access to PG&E and city vehicles when needed. These gates are secured by simple padlocks and chains.

Adjacent homeowners have always had access to the three plots through gates in shared fences so that they can maintain their fencing, prevent ivy from encroaching, remove ivy from city trees, etc. For generations, children have used these rights-of-way as informal play spaces.



Legal ownership and responsibility for the sites

PG&E is the legal owner of the land in all three rights-of-way plots, except for 20-foot-wide strips on either side of each plot that are owned by the city so that homeowners can deal with the city, rather than PG&E, regarding matters of shared concern such as shared fences and maintenance of the city trees that were planted on either side of each right-of-way to provide visual screening between residence backyards and the high-tension wires.

For properties at 756 Grape Ave, 782 Grape Ave, 773 Melon Ct, and 1033 Cambridge Ave, the land under the high-tension wires is part of the deeded private property (with a PG&E easement enabling access), so this proposal won't affect that land's status.

History of site vegetation management

The trees on either side of the right-of-way in the city-owned strips of land are the legal responsibility of the city to maintain. During 2000-2022 the city generally ignored these trees

citing insufficient budget and long service backlogs except when adjacent property owners filed claims regarding excessive shading of backyards or falling tree forks. A number of the city trees have died during the drought and have been pruned to tall stumps by the City.

PG&E largely neglected its responsibility for vegetation management during this period. The result was that the site became overgrown with brush.

In 2022, in the wake of repeated California wildfires, PG&E reinvigorated its vegetation management practices and sent a large crew that spent over a week removing every tree and bush less than 6' tall in order to prevent the possibility of fire ladders into the treetops in the event of a fire. Of course, this is a core urban area, and a Public Safety staff member has stated an unofficial personal opinion that it's extremely unlikely that a wildfire would ever reach this location, so it's highly questionable whether there's an actual need for preventing all vegetation 6' or lower in height at this site.

We propose that Sunnyvale Parks & Recreation assume legal responsibility for vegetation at this site as at other Sunnyvale parks and that it determine a vegetation management policy consistent with preserving and enhancing natural, drought-tolerant vegetation within an urban core area.

Expected initial users of Cherry Chase Natural Park

- Children who wish to exercise, explore, or play in a natural open space
- Community members who wish to exercise, walk their dogs on leash, and enjoy a natural open space
- People who wish to use the open space for casual outdoor gatherings such as children's birthday parties or informal sports

Intended initial uses of Cherry Chase Natural Park

- Exploration by children of the natural trees and bushes of the rights-of-way
- Open space for children's games such as tag, hide-and-seek, laser tag, etc.

- Casual dirt sports areas for T-ball, kickball, or softball
- Casual dirt field for children's soccer, flag football, Ultimate (formerly known as flag frisbee), etc.

Possible future uses of Cherry Chase Natural Park

- Reforestation of the edges via the Miyawaki method to create natural, drought-tolerant landscaping
- Community vegetable garden in the Dona Ave to teach children about gardening
- Milkweed planting to provide habitat for Monarch butterfly larvae
- Habitat for native insects, birds, and animals provided by native plants
- Additional sports activities like bocce ball

Providing open natural space for physical and mental health benefits for children, adolescents, and adults

We are facing an epidemic of sedentary behavior, overweight, obesity, and diabetes among children and adolescents. Excessive screen time exacerbates all of these problems. For the health of future generations, we need to get our children playing outdoors in natural spaces. Research has shown that children benefit from playing in nature.

We are facing a rising rate of asthma and other allergic conditions. Outdoor play time can reduce a child's risk of asthma.[1] We are also facing an epidemic of mental health problems among our children, particularly after the stress of the pandemic, most concerningly expressed by increased by increased rates of depression, suicide attempts, and even violent behavior like school shootings. Published peer-reviewed scientific studies have proven that spending time in nature is beneficial for the mental health of children and adolescents and that these benefits continue into adulthood. We should be preserving the remaining natural open spaces that provide such experiences:

[1] Geoffrey H. Donovan et al, "Vegetation diversity protects against childhood asthma: results from a large New Zealand birth cohort," 7 May 2018 Nature Plants, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41477-018-0151-8

- A "nation-wide study covering >900,000 people shows that children who grew up with the lowest levels of green space had up to 55% higher risk of developing a psychiatric disorder independent from effects of other known risk factors."[2]
- In another peer-reviewed study, "Adults with low levels of childhood NOE [Natural Outdoor Environment] exposure had, when compared to adults with high levels of childhood NOE exposure, significantly worse mental health (coef. −4.13; 95% CI −5.52, −2.74)."[3]
- Another literature review showed "significant decreases in depressed affect, antisocial behaviour and moderate to vigorous physical activity, and increases in play with natural materials, independent play, and prosocial behaviours. Early Childhood Educators observed improved socialization, problem-solving, focus, self-regulation, creativity and self-confidence, and reduced stress, boredom and injury. Outdoor play spaces are important for promoting children's wellbeing and development."[4]

Natural environments are rare in modern urban environments and are getting rarer. The state is forcing the City of Sunnyvale to zone for increased housing density. The City has now rezoned El Camino Real so that both sides can be transformed into 6-8 story high-density housing and mixed-use complexes. So population density in the Cherry Chase area will only be increasing. Therefore, it's vital that we preserve the few natural play areas that children have for the children of today and tomorrow. These natural play spaces complement the traditional manicured lawn parks we have already. The "Ramona Ave plot" between Ramona Ave and Lois Ave is to the best of our knowledge the largest remaining natural space in the Cherry Chase neighborhood.

[2] Kristine Engemann et al, "Residential green space in childhood is associated with lower risk of psychiatric disorders from adolescence into adulthood," 14 Jan 2019 PNAS, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1807504116
[3] Myriam Preuss et al, "Low Childhood Nature Exposure is Associated with Worse Mental Health in Adulthood," 22 May 2019 Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16101809
[4] Aerika S. Brittian and Marisha L. Humphries, "Prosocial Behavior during Adolescence," International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (2nd ed), 2015, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.23190-5

Providing park space compliant with city municipal code requirements as our population grows

Sunnyvale Municipal Code, § 18.10.030 (“Land requirement”) states that, consistent with the General Plan, a specified acreage “for each one thousand persons residing within each neighborhood planning area” is to be devoted to public park and recreational facilities. Since **July 1, 2014**, that requirement has been **5.00 acres per 1,000 persons**. Sunnyvale recently upzoned El Camino Real in the El Camino Precise Plan so that high-density mixed-use complexes can be built at the Bernardo and El Camino Real node and all along El Camino Real. Sunnyvale’s population is increasing and can be expected to continue increasing, and the population density along El Camino Real from Bernardo to Mary will particularly increase. Yet people living in this section of El Camino Real have very few outdoor park spaces. There is Washington Park far away on Sylvan Drive, and there is the tiny Greenwood Manor Park on Ramona Ave. Sunnyvale should ensure that people living in future high-density housing along El Camino Real will have ready access to sufficient outdoor play space. Using the Ramona Ave plot and the Dona Ave plot as natural play spaces are perhaps the only financially-feasible ways to accomplish that. They’re also the most cost-effective opportunities to increase neighborhood and total city green space as required by the municipal code.

A better use for the site: creating a Cherry Chase Natural Park

Turning the Ramona Ave plot and Dona Ave plot into a “Cherry Chase Natural Park” would create a great play space for local children, families, and anyone else who wished to enjoy open space including dog owners who wished to walk their dogs. The Ramona Ave plot already has two wide open dirt areas that are suitable for children to play softball, T-ball, kickball and short-field sports like soccer.

The Cherry Chase Natural Park could preserve natural landscaping and provide drought-tolerant California native plants and milkweed to support the Monarch butterfly population. It will provide open space for people to read, exercise, and do yoga. In the Dona Ave plot, a bocce ball court and a community vegetable garden for children to learn about growing food could be added.

Distant future: linking Dona Ave plot via a walkway through the Lois Ave plot to the Ramona Ave plot Cherry Chase Natural Park

We are not proposing this change for the foreseeable future (likely until the mid-2030s at the earliest), but in the distant future, a walkway through the Lois Ave plot could be created to link the Dona Ave plot to the Ramona Ave plot together with Greenwood Park via marked crosswalks to create new Cherry Chase Natural Park. There is a portion of the Lois Ave plot that has no infrastructure, so a simple metal fence could be used to separate the walkway from the rest of the Lois Ave plot that has PG&E infrastructure. Any such change would of course require PG&E consent. But for the foreseeable future, our focus is on the cheaper, easier win of granting community access to the Ramona Ave plot and the Dona Ave plot with no changes to the Lois Ave plot.

Complementary roles for Greenwood Park and Cherry Chase Natural Park

Greenwood Park has served the surrounding neighborhood well for decades. It provides a sandy play area with playground equipment for children and a plot of functional green grass that is useful for children and families to picnic or play informal games of soccer or badminton. We believe that Greenwood Park in its current form will continue to play a useful complementary role to the new Cherry Chase Natural Park, so we are proposing no changes to it.

An inclusive process

Community planning must be open and inclusive, soliciting input and ideas from locals and building support. Therefore, we will develop the plan for Cherry Chase Natural Park in an open, inclusive fashion. Major drafts of site plans will be posted for community review on Google Docs, and comments will be allowed via comments on the Google Docs pages. Each major revision will be announced across the Cherry Chase Network Association email list and the Cherry Chase Neighborhood groups on Facebook and NextDoor, plus on dedicated Facebook and

NextDoor pages that will be created to facilitate the development of the Cherry Chase Natural Park plan.

Addressing the challenge of climate change

California recently experienced a 1200-year drought. Despite the recent atmospheric rivers that officially ended the drought for the moment, California appears to be undergoing aridification (a long-term change towards a hotter, drier climate and from forested land to grassland) as a result of climate change.[5] Therefore, even as it does its part to try to reduce its emissions, the City of Sunnyvale will have to adapt to these ongoing long-term climate changes.

Traditionally, parks have been covered by green grass that requires artificial year-round drenching irrigation to survive. Year-round drenching irrigation of land is obviously not a practice we want to expand going forward. Instead, we want to find ways to make new park land beautiful, welcoming, and useful with as little artificial irrigation as possible.

Therefore, we propose to use the Cherry Chase Natural Park as a pilot for demonstrating that new parks can be created that are beautiful, welcoming, and useful for recreation without the need for drenching artificial irrigation or green lawns.

The rights-of-way have existing legacy trees and bushes that have survived to date without artificial irrigation other than that provided indirectly by adjacent homeowner lawn irrigation systems. We propose that these legacy trees and bushes be left in place for the initial park opening (other than removal of dying, non-native, and/or invasive trees as described under the site cleanup section).

The existing bare ground is suitable for use as sports areas for T-ball, kickball, or softball at the Lois Ave end of the right-of-way and for use as a children's sports field for games like soccer,

[5] Hayley Smith, "Extreme heat, drought will permanently scar California and its social fabric," 30 June 2022 LA Times, https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2022-06-30/aridification-kills-civilizations-is-california-next, accessed 2 July 2023.

flag football, or Ultimate (formerly known as Ultimate Frisbee) at the Ramona Ave end of the right-of-way.

Natural vegetation management

Greenwood Park is managed in an aggressive fashion by the Parks & Recreation Department so that even leaves and sticks that fall from the trees are rapidly removed. This produces a park that is considered elegant and clean in traditional terms, but is relatively barren of natural life because the natural food for fungi, termites, and other scavengers (fallen leaves and twigs) has been removed.

One of the special features of the existing Ramona Ave plot is that it is an environment that has received minimal maintenance over the years. When sticks, leaves, pine needles, and berries fall down, they remain on the ground and break down naturally. This provides food for fungi that grow when rain falls, bugs, beetles, termites, and other natural creatures and creates a natural environment that children can explore and learn from. This natural forest floor environment also serves to reduce water loss due to evaporation.

We propose that rather than traditional lawn greenscaping, Sunnyvale Parks & Recreation manage the land, especially around the plot's periphery, as a natural environment that they will disturb as little as possible other than for reforestation with native plants. When sticks and branches fall, they will be allowed to break down naturally, also serving as playthings for children in the meantime who already use them to construct play teepees or log structures.

An Agile approach for rapid park definition and opening

City planning processes for something like a park commonly follow a serial, waterfall approach. First, a study issue has to be proposed by a city commission at the start of the two-year capital planning cycle, and the City Council has to approve that proposal. The City hires a consultant, and an initial feasibility study takes 9-12 months. Then a proposal for the intended final state of the park is developed, which takes another 9-12 months. The proposal has to be reviewed and approved and budget allocated. Then the project begins to put the land into the intended, final,

“perfect” state for the park, which may take 1-3 years, and finally the park is opened, so the whole process can take 3-5 years at best, and typically takes twenty years.

Because the site is usable in its current state (with minor cleanup) for purposes such as play by children, we propose a different approach. We want the site to begin providing community benefit as soon as possible, even while additional improvements are studied and considered for the future. Therefore, borrowing from Agile methodology that is widely used in Silicon Valley for software development, we propose to define and deliver the “Minimum Viable Park” (MVP) (a concept derived from the Minimum Viable Product in Agile project management framework), which is the simplest park specification that will make the park safe for public use and an initial opening to quickly provide initial benefits to the community (such as a play space for children). We propose that rather than defaulting to traditional planning processes, the City treat these plots as “low hanging fruit” for the creation of a new park at low cost and a test case for whether it’s possible for the City to deliver benefits to the community faster than traditional practices have allowed.

Minimum Viable Park is a foundation, not an endpoint

The Minimum Viable Park is not the final endpoint for the site improvement process. Instead, it begins providing benefits to the community immediately while also serving as a legal and community use foundation for iterative improvements thereafter. Once the Minimum Viable Park is open, the Parks & Recreation Commission can entertain proposals for iterative park improvements over time in its regular annual budget cycles, even while the park already is providing benefits to the community.

Legal framework for Cherry Chase Natural Park

Fortunately, there is no need to invent a new legal framework for collaboration between the City and PG&E on this project. Greenwood Manor Park on Ramona Ave is an adjacent, existing City park under the PG&E high tension lines. We should simply apply the Greenwood Manor Park legal framework to the Ramona Ave plot and the Dona Ave plot by mutual consent between City and PG&E.

PG&E consent

None of this plan is possible without PG&E's consent as the landowner. Therefore, obtaining PG&E's approval in principle of the natural park plan will be our first step. Fortunately, the new management of PG&E is eager to be a good community neighbor, and allowing the creation of a natural drought-tolerant park of special interest to children will fit in well with their new focus on community service, resilience, and adaptation to climate change. PG&E already responded to a letter from Mayor Klein saying they're open to park conversion if City of Sunnyvale shows PG&E a plan. Council approved $75,000 in funding for a feasibility study of the park conversion in 2024. Since then, City of Sunnyvale processes have moved slowly and so far have produced no useful results.

In late 2026, PG&E sent a letter to City asking that park conversion be delayed until after the 2031 reconductoring project. There is no need for such a delay. The City is not planning to extensively develop these areas at all, and they could still be closed for as long as PG&E wants (including parking vehicles, storage, and even digging) for the 2031 reconductoring and other projects whenever needed using the existing fencing.

At that point, City staff should have notified Council of the PG&E and provided Councilmembers and community members an opportunity to engage with PG&E and get the request for a delay cancelled. Unfortunately, City staff chose to make the study issue "complete" without any opportunity for Councilmembers or the community to weigh in. Staff or Council should reopen that study issue and provide time for Council and the public to engage with PG&E and get the request for a delay rescinded, or at least reopen the funded study issue if PG&E sends an updated letter canceling their request for a delay.

Five options for future use of the plots

Do nothing (status quo)

If we do nothing, the plots will remain underutilized, providing little benefit to the community. Use of the plots will probably continue by neighborhood children and other residents without a clear governing framework or understanding of potential liability issues.

Minimum Viable Park made from the Ramona Ave plot (and possibly also the Dona Ave plot), initially in their current form with only minor cleanup

The Minimum Viable Park of the current proposal will open the plots one at a time to the community, allow ready access by children and interested others, put use of the plots on a clear legal framework, and begin providing benefit to the community immediately while consideration is given to future enhancements.

“Enhanced plots with Miyawaki Pocket Forests”

This follow-on option iteratively evolves the plots into a connected nature pathway for pedestrian and bicyclist access. The plots would be linked with marked crosswalks between them to support pedestrian and bicyclist access and the walking of dogs on leashes consistent with city ordinances. Paved walkways suitable for pedestrian, dog-walking, wheelchair, and bicycle use would run through the plots connecting the crosswalks. The land would be improved with Miyawaki Pocket Forests to reduce the urban heat island effect and cool the city. Underneath the high tension wires, native drought-tolerant trees and bushes that would grow no taller than a safe height and/or low-lying drought-tolerant plants would be planted to produce a sustainable, drought-tolerant nature pathway. This would provide a better natural environment for native birds and animals than the current bare dirt and non-native trees. As a result it would support species preservation while providing an attractive nature path for pedestrians, bicyclists, and people walking dogs to enjoy.



"Enhanced mixed-use park"

Like the previous option, this option would: include Miyawaki Pocket Forests at the edges of the plots, a painted crosswalk between Greenwood Manor Park and the Ramona Ave plot, and paved walkways; use native drought-tolerant trees, bushes, and plants; and support species preservation and access by pedestrians, bicyclists, and people walking dogs. This option would assign some space for more active use such as a play areas, a bocce ball court, etc.



"Integrated greenbelt" with Ramona, Lois, and Dona changed into cul-de-sacs

There has been a longstanding proposal (originally known as "Linear Park in the 1990s) to turn Ramona Avenue, Lois Avenue, and Dona Avenue into cul-de-sacs and join the rights-of-way together with Greenwood Park to create an extensive greenbelt that would be a great play space for local children, families, and anyone else who wished to enjoy open space including dog owners who wished to walk their dogs.



We assume that funds to transform Ramona Ave, Lois Ave, and Dona Ave into cul-de-sacs will be lacking, and that therefore the full integrated greenbelt option with cul-de-sacs will be financially infeasible for the foreseeable future.

Site limitations and restrictions

Limited parking

The proposed location for the neighborhood park is a residential neighborhood with no space for a parking lot and only on-street parking available. We do not believe that a small neighborhood park without a restroom will become a major city or regional destination. So long as uses that encourage high-intensity daily visits by numerous individuals (such as an off-leash dog park) are not chosen, we believe that existing on-street parking will probably suffice, particularly if the current through-street status of Ramona, Lois, and Dona is preserved (rather than transforming them into cul-de-sacs) so that on-street parking remains possible adjacent to the park sections on all three streets.

Immediately adjacent homes and desire to minimize noise and smell pollution

The rights-of-way abut existing homes for which the rights-of-way have always been unoccupied, silent neighbors. The overwhelming public opposition to the 2022 proposal to turn

the Ramona Ave plot into an off-leash dog park made it clear that Cherry Chase Neighborhood does not want a new land use that creates significant traffic, parking pressure, and noise or smell pollution, so as we transform these rights-of-way into spaces that are open for community use, we should avoid creating new traffic and parking pressure for the neighborhood and noise or smell problems for the immediately adjacent homes. Therefore, we will not be proposing any uses in the park that are noisy (dog park, skateboard park, basketball court, pickleball court, etc.) or smelly or prone to generate heavy daily traffic (such as an off-leash dog park). In addition, since unlike large public parks, there are no offsets from adjacent homes, we propose that the use of sound amplification within the Cherry Chase Natural Park be prohibited except when the city explicitly authorizes it by special permit (e.g. for a special event). We also propose that consistent with the approach of the existing Greenwood Park and the City guidance for “mini parks” in Sunnyvale’s Parks of the Future Plan, no urinals or latrines be provided as those would create a smell problem for adjacent residences and increase the risk of illegal camping. As a mini park, Cherry Chase Natural Park will be intended for short visits and walks.

Limited access from major streets

The proposed Cherry Chase Natural Park is on residential side streets that visitors will have to drive through to reach it. Ramona Ave, Lois Ave, and Dona Ave were never intended to be high-traffic streets, and the City of Sunnyvale recently spent a large amount of money on traffic calming for Blair Ave, which is one of the primary streets that provides access to these quiet side streets. Therefore, the city should avoid aggressive promotion of the mini-park as a major destination. Rather, it should be described on the city web site as a natural mini park without services.

PG&E requirements

Access to overhead infrastructure

The site cannot be developed in a way that prevents PG&E from: accessing the base of the pylons or service building in the Lois-Dona plot; getting PG&E service vehicles on to the plots as needed; or gaining access to neighborhood power poles adjacent to the plots or accessing the

neighborhood overhead lines that go over some of them. Therefore, vehicle access will be preserved by the existing gates in the existing fences and no site improvements will be made that will block vehicle access. Preserving the existing fences with their gates (which can simply be chained shut) also makes it easy for PG&E to close the plots when needed during future projects such as the 2031 reconductoring.

Compliance with fire prevention guidelines

PG&E contractors have stated that their current site management plan is focused on fire prevention and requires that trees and brush smaller than 6' high be removed to avoid creating a "fire ladder" into treetops. While we appreciate PG&E's concern after the disastrous wilderness-urban interface wildfires and desire to be a better steward of its properties, in an urban core like central Sunnyvale, we believe that this strict fire prevention protocol is not necessary and that a modified protocol can be negotiated with the City of Sunnyvale assuming responsibility for fire prevention and vegetation management just as it does for other Sunnyvale parks. Miyawaki pocket forests as proposed for parts of this site can serve as natural fire breaks.[6] Such a modified protocol would allow the City to plant natural drought-tolerant plants, bushes, and smaller trees in the parks.

Protection of PG&E infrastructure

Signage will advise that the flying of kites or drones and the launching of model rockets is prohibited. Such risks already theoretically exist in Greenwood Park, even without signage warning against them, but they've never been a significant problem in practice.

Presence of legacy metal fencing

Each of the three plots is enclosed within metal fencing where there are no fences of adjacent properties. For the initial park opening, we propose to leave the fencing in place and simply lock the existing gates in the open position with their existing chains and padlocks.

[6] Neelam Patil, "How to plant get CalFIRE funding to a Miyawaki Forest at your school," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BAkCGMuEwg, accessed 25 Feb 2023.

Budgetary limitations

We believe that the minimal work necessary to create the “Minimum Viable Park” can be accomplished within existing PG&E site maintenance and city departmental maintenance and discretionary staff time budgets as permitted by City Council by an enabling measure.

Sunnyvale capital improvement projects are budgeted out on a 20-year basis. For Sunnyvale to add this park, according to its 20-year capital budget planning process, it will need to defer another equal expense to keep the capital budget in balance.[7] We believe however that the capital budget required for opening the Minimum Viable Park will be next to nothing, and therefore it would be a missed opportunity to keep the PG&E right of way plots as fenced-in plots inaccessible for general community use for years to come.

Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation assumes annual maintenance expenses of $34-35,000/acre for parks for budgeting purposes.[8] The planned drought-tolerant natural landscaping and use of volunteer labor for planting should reduce costs for establishing and maintaining the park in practice versus costs for a traditional green lawn park.

Proposed sequence for rollout of Cherry Chase Natural Park plots

The “Ramona Ave plot” right-of-way between Ramona Ave and Lois Ave is one of the two largest of the three rights-of-way. Unlike the “Lois Ave plot” between Lois Ave and Dona Ave, it has no power pylons or PG&E service buildings that take up space and (in the case of the pylons) would require new fencing to prevent unauthorized climbing. Therefore, we propose to open the plots in the following sequence:

- Ramona Ave plot
- Dona Ave plot

[7] Jim Stark, Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation Department
[8] Jim Stark, Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation Department.



Ramona Ave plot site-specific considerations

Preservation of protected California berry bush

The Ramona Ave plot includes a native California berry bush that is protected due to its threatened status. This berry bush must be preserved in the site use plan; we propose to leave it in place.

Prioritized repairs for the Ramona Ave plot out of existing budgets

Sidewalk repairs on Ramona Ave in front of right-of-way

The sidewalks in front of the Ramona Ave have been buckled up by tree roots for years. Once the site is promoted from an empty right-of-way plot to a natural park, the sidewalk repairs become a higher priority. We propose that Sunnyvale prioritize those sidewalk repairs on Ramona Ave within the existing sidewalk repair budget.

Dying tree removal

Residents on Lois Ave have reported that some of the tall evergreen trees adjacent to their home (which are on the city's land strip, and therefore the city's responsibility) are dying and need to be removed. As the site is prepared to become a public park, this matter becomes a

higher priority, and we recommend that these trees be prioritized within the city's existing tree trimming budget and promptly removed.

Tree branch removal near neighborhood power lines

A tree that is underneath the neighborhood (not high-tension) power line has some dead branches overhead. It appears that PG&E chose not to remove them during the recent brush clearing because they are somewhat near the neighborhood power line and it was easier to leave them in place than to remove them. If the plot is to be turned into a park, these dead branches should be removed. PG&E could handle this out of its usual budget for tree branch removal near power lines.

Obsolete switching cabinet removal

There are abandoned empty metal switching cabinets on either side of the Ramona Ave plot. These are legacy trash of PG&E's, are therefore PG&E's responsibility, and we recommend that PG&E be asked to remove them within its existing site maintenance budget. Failing that, Sunnyvale DPW could easily remove them with a pickup truck that has a winch and cart them to the landfill.

Unused natural gas pipe removal or burial

On the Lois Ave side, there is unused home natural gas hookup pipe that is securely capped off and appears to be in good condition. It appears that this was put in place by mistake when the neighborhood was laid out on the assumption that the plot would be a private home and then left in place once it was determined that it would only be a right-of way. This pipe should be dug up and removed or at least covered with dirt and marked against future digging.

Aluminum pipe removal

There is what appears to be some bent aluminum pipe of unclear function near the power pole that's adjacent to 755 Ramona Ave. It's not clear if it's currently serving any function. If it's

obsolete, it should be removed by PG&E under their ordinary site maintenance services budget. If it's serving a purpose, it probably needs to be repaired as it's bent out of shape.

Prioritized improvements for the Ramona Ave plot out of existing budgets

Signage explaining the park, listing its opening and closing hours, and describing the rules for use will be attached to the metal fencing. Initially, since there will be no budget for permanent signage, we propose that these be simple laminated sheets of paper attached by cable ties, written and attached by local volunteers after the city has approved the verbiage. An improved sign can be installed when budget and time allows.

Project timeline for Minimum Viable Park

Date	Action Item	Status
	Community outreach and engagement with Parks and Recreation Commission and Public Works department begins	done
	Present plan to Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocate. Discuss concept at Parks & Recreation Commission meeting.	done
	Study issue submitted. Cherry Chase Neighborhood feedback obtained.	
	City Council approves concept in principle and approves seeking of agreement with PG&E.	
	PG&E agreement in principle obtained.	
	Memorandum of Understanding signed between Sunnyvale and PG&E extending Greenwood Park legal structure to Ramona Ave plot at park opening.	
	Sidewalks repaired. Ramona Ave plot cleared of legacy PG&E infrastructure. City Council defers other project(s) in Parks & Recreation 20-year-budget commitment as needed to enable addition of this new parkland.	
	Signage posted. Park opens.	

Following that timeline, the Minimal Viable Park in the Ramona Ave plot could be opened to the public rapidly.

Ramona Ave plot post-launch site improvements

Once the Ramona Ave plot has been opened as a simple city park, additional improvements can be proposed and made over time through the ordinary annual city budgeting process. We include some ideas for future consideration.

Paved walkway to improve disabled accessibility

The natural open space in Cherry Chase Natural Park is analogous to the open green lawn of a traditional park. The sidewalks at the border of each plot will be analogous to the sidewalks at the edge of traditional parks. Therefore, we don't believe that additional paved walkways are necessary within the Minimum Viable Park, just as paved walkways into the middle of every green lawn are not required in a traditional park. However, as additional services are provided in the future such as a community vegetable garden, a paved walkway should be added to ease access by mobility impaired and disabled visitors to those services. When these walkways are added, care should be taken not to interfere with the usability of the open dirt spaces in the Ramona Ave plot as playing fields or the ability of PG&E vehicles to access the interior of the plots. To preserve the privacy of adjacent homeowner backyards, the walkways will also not be routed directly next to the fences. We propose that the walkways be placed at the edge of the proposed Miyawaki Pocket Forest strips on one side.

Dona Ave Plot

This site is the smallest of the three available right-of-way plots because half of the right-of-way space is deeded property of adjacent property owners. We propose that it be opened second because it provides less usable space than the Ramona Ave plot and like the Ramona Ave plot lacks the complexities posed by PG&E infrastructure of the Lois-Dona plot.

Lois Ave Plot

This plot poses the most challenges for any public use because it has two pylons for the high-tension wires, a PG&E service building, and a microphone on a pole for monitoring aircraft noise. Therefore we propose no changes for the foreseeable future. In the distant future, with PG&E consent, we might create a walkway to connect the Dona Ave plot to the Ramona Ave plot.

If a walkway is one day created on one side of the Lois Ave Plot, the remainder of the Lois Ave plot that holds the PG&E infrastructure could be secured by a simple metal fence as is already done facing Lois Ave and Dona Ave.

Improvement concepts for use across the plots

The below ideas can be applied on either of the two target plots after the first park opens as approvals are obtained and funds and volunteers are found.

Professional signage

Professional signage could be installed in at least one location (likely starting adjacent to the Ramona Ave side of the Ramona Ave plot) to replace the initial simple signage.

Plant survey across the three plots

Volunteers could conduct a plant survey across the two target plots as background information for reforestation and native vegetation replanting efforts. Non-native plants and seeds could be removed from the plots and soil via solarization, tilling, and/or repetitive weeding. (See Test Plot by Terremoto for a case study of repetitive watering and weeding.)

Pocket forests in the Miyawaki method to promote reforestation

According to a federal survey, “California lost more than 36 million trees in the last year alone,” largely due to drought,[9] making efforts at reforestation more important than ever. A “pocket forest”[10] is a small patch of land that has been reforested with native trees and bushes. The Miyawaki method[11] plants native trees far more densely than traditional monoculture to create a dense, diverse forest that captures moisture, cools the environment, and serves as a much more effective carbon sink.[12] All of Dona Plot and the periphery of Ramona plot not used for exercise open space are candidates for use as pocket forests.

Neelam Patil has led an effort to create Miyawaki pocket forests at three Berkeley schools and is now advising people who want to learn more, so we can draw on her expertise. (See her webinar for details.) Volunteers can handle the initial planting of Miyawaki forest, minimizing startup labor cost to the City while educating the participants.[13] A pocket forest can attract native birds, animals, and butterflies.[14]

Establishment of immature trees typically requires artificial irrigation that can be accomplished via water-efficient drip irrigation. Putting drip irrigation in place and supplying water for 18-36 months would probably be the largest expense for the Miyawaki Pocket Forest since volunteers can handle tree planting and selective weeding. After 18 months to three years, the Miyawaki forest can be weaned from artificial watering,[15] making it a highly sustainable approach to reforestation in urban environments such as Sunnyvale that are undergoing extreme drought and aridification. Miyawaki forests require little maintenance,[16] which would make this park

[9] Nathan Rott, “California lost more than 36 million trees in the last year alone,” 14 Feb 23 NPR, https://www.npr.org/2023/02/14/1156987125/california-lost-more-than-36-million-trees-in-the-last-year-alone, accessed 2 Mar 23.
[10] Sugi Project, https://www.sugiproject.com/, accessed 25 Feb 2023.
[11] “Akira Miyawaki,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akira_Miyawaki, accessed 25 Feb 2023.
[12] Neelam Patil, “How to plant get CalFIRE funding to a Miyawaki Forest at your school,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BAkCGMuEwg, accessed 25 Feb 2023.
[13] Hoi Poon, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action.
[14] Hoi Poon, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action.
[15] Neelam Patil, “How to plant get CalFIRE funding to a Miyawaki Forest at your school,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BAkCGMuEwg, accessed 25 Feb 2023.
[16] Hoi Poon, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action

cheaper for the City to maintain than traditional lawn parks. Signage can educate community members about reforestation and climate change resilience.

We will need to select native trees, bushes, and other plants that are short enough that they won't conflict at maturity with the high-tension overhead lines. Trees of all sizes should be placed so that they won't conflict at maturity with lower neighborhood service power lines that run across the middle of the Ramona and Lois plots. Bushes may be chosen instead.

Composting for neighbors and the community

Some neighbors are already composting their own household food waste in the rights-of-way. This effort could be expanded to provide compost for use in the pocket forest and other site replanting efforts. Additional compost may be available from Fremont Union High School District.[17]

Climate change education in partnership with schools

Sunnyvale schools could partner with the Parks and Recreation Department, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action, and neighborhood volunteers to use the sites for education about climate change and the value of reforestation and native plants for resilience and species preservation.[18] Interested classes and students could volunteer to work on reforestation and planting.

Applying for grants for urban greening

Grants are available from Valley Water and CalFire for urban greening work. These grants are more likely to be approved when they include education of students.[19] Assemblymember Ash Kalra has also introduced AB 57, which would "authorize CAL FIRE to provide demonstration grants for pocket forests to public and nonprofit entities."[20]

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[17] Hoi Poon, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action.
[18] Hoi Poon, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action.
[19] Hoi Poon, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action.
[20] "Assemblymember Kalra Introduces Bill to Promote Urban Greening," 6 Dec 22, https://a25.asmdc.org/press-releases/20221206-assemblymember-kalra-introduces-bill-promote-urban-greening, accessed 2 Mar 23.

Bird houses

Bird houses suitable in size for songbirds (not the ravens that spread West Nile Virus) could be placed on the trees to support native bird repopulation.

Bat house

Bats naturally keep down the population of mosquitoes that spread West Nile Virus. The Cherry Chase neighborhood has repeatedly been designated as a West Nile Hot Spot by the Santa Clara County Vector Control District. Installing a bat house in a shaded location where children would not come in contact with the bat droppings or any sick/dead bats that fell from it (perhaps due to separating fencing and/or vegetation below it) would support bat repopulation and control mosquitoes and allow community members to observe bats as they came out in the evenings. Signage could educate children about bats and their value in the ecosystem.

Integration of critter cams for education of children

“Critter cams” (small solar-powered video cameras focused on the interior and/or exterior of bird houses, the bat house, and the beehive) could be deployed so interested children and community members could watch the video feeds and learn about animals. Video feeds could be put on the web through neighbor WiFi networks or perhaps through a partnership with Verizon, which deployed a mobile phone relay station in the Lois plot.

Marked paint crosswalks and paved curb ramps for disabled accessibility

To ease pedestrian crossings between Greenwood Manor Park and the Ramona Ave plot, a simple crosswalk should be painted on Ramona Ave connecting Greenwood Park with the Ramona Ave plot. Because it is a residential side street with little traffic, we do not believe that a lighted crosswalk, crossing traffic signals, or audible crosswalk guidance are necessary or cost-effective uses of Sunnyvale street improvement or safety funds that could be spent with greater benefit elsewhere.

For disabled accessibility, a crosswalk must connect with curb cutouts on both sides of the street. A curb cutout must be created on the Greenwood Park side, and the irrigation pipes for

the curb city trees will need to run beneath the concrete. A curb cutout already exists at the entrance gate on the Ramona plot side, but it is gravel and must be paved for disabled accessibility.

Fortunately, until the crosswalk improvements are made, pedestrians and people needing a ramp for mobility can use the driveway curb ramps of adjacent homes at 755/756 Ramona Ave and walk with care across the street or cross at the street corners which already have ramps.

If one day in the distant future a walkway is created through the Lois Ave plot, crosswalks can be added on Dona and Lois as well so that the entire set of mini parks from Dona Ave to Greenwood Manor Park are continuously connected by crosswalks and walkways.

Installation of water-efficient drip irrigation around periphery of plots

We do not propose drenching irrigation or green lawns for any of the plots. However, we believe that the city may wish to invest in providing water-efficient drip irrigation for plants around each plot's periphery to support establishment of the Miyawaki Pocket Forests or so that a slightly richer variety of native California plants can be supported.

Planting of milkweed to support Monarch butterfly repopulation

"In July 2022, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) re-classified the migratory monarch butterfly as endangered on its "red list." It had previously been classified as declining … The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded that listing monarchs under the Federal Endangered Species Act would be warranted but is precluded due to other high priority species. The monarch was scheduled to be federally listed in 2024."[21] We propose to support Monarch butterfly repopulation by planting milkweed, their sole food source, around the edge of the Ramona Ave plot and perhaps in the others as well. Since Cherry Chase Natural Park is on the Monarch migration pathway[22], this will support Monarch preservation and repopulation.

[21] Ken Paglia, 15 Aug 2022 Santa Monica Daily Press, "Is the monarch butterfly now listed as endangered?," https://smdp.com/2022/08/15/is-the-monarch-butterfly-now-listed-as-endangered/
[22] MonarchWatch.org, "Monarch Migration," https://monarchwatch.org/migration/, accessed 2 July 2023.

Removal of non-native ligustrum (privet) trees

The Ramona Ave plot includes at least one remaining non-native ligustrum (privet) tree in the city easement in the corner adjacent to 755 Ramona Ave. This tree is in poor condition due to age and ivy encroachment. Further, ligustrum is an invasive non-native species that birds rapidly spread to surrounding areas after they eat the berries. When ligustrum establishes itself in a native woodland, it crowds out native plants and reduces the number of birds and pollinators. Conversely, eliminating ligustrum can restore bees and butterflies.[23] The city should remove this remaining ligustrum tree, and this area can then be reforested with native trees as part of the planned Miyawaki pocket forest.

Removal and grinding down of tree stumps

Multiple privets that were planted by the city in a row early in the history of the rights-of-way to provide visual screening of homeowner backyards from the high-tension wires have died. The city cut off the top of the dead trees but left about 10' of stump behind. These stumps should be removed and ground down and replaced by new trees for reforestation (consistent with Sunnyvale's city goal of extensive tree coverage), to restore privacy screening between the new park and adjacent homeowner backyards, to stop children's balls that may otherwise accidentally be hit or kicked into homeowner backyards, and as a long-term safety measure since although they may appear to currently be solidly rooted in place, dead tree stumps ultimately do fall.

Screening vegetation between plots and adjacent homeowner backyards

Once the drip irrigation system has been laid, we should plant natural drought-tolerant screening vegetation along each fence to provide habitat for insects, birds, and animals, to provide children hiding places during games of hide-and-seek, and to provide privacy screening for adjacent homeowner backyards. Using the edge of each right-of-way as part of the Miyawaki pocket forest would serve this purpose.

[23] Haeley Giambalvo, "5 Important Reasons to Not Plant Ligustrum (Privet)," https://nativebackyards.com/ligustrum/, accessed 25 Feb 2023.

Development of community garden[24]

Once irrigation has been added to the site, some residents have expressed interest in having a community garden so that residents can grow fresh food and children can learn about gardening. The irrigation system could be extended to provide drip irrigation to the vegetable bed.

Bocce ball court

Bocce ball is an activity that requires little space and is entertaining for community members of all ages. A bocce ball court could be placed in either of the two target plots. It might be good for the Dona plot to preserve open play space in the Ramona Ave plot.

Example layout showing coexistence of multiple uses

Below is an illustration of how multiple uses could be combined across the multiple plots without duplicating each other or the services available at Greenwood Manor Park. (The Miyawaki Pocket Forest on either side of each plot screens the adjacent residences and increases the total square footage of forest space created, so the multiple areas assigned to Miyawaki Pocket Forests are not considered duplicative.) This layout should be considered illustrative, not definitive.



[24] Thanks to Councilmember Srinivasan and community member Rainy Fraser for this suggestion.

Limited hours because of proximity to residences

Cherry Chase Natural Park will be immediately adjacent to the backyards and bedrooms of adjacent residents with no offsets. To avoid disturbing the sleep of adjacent residents, the neighborhood requests that the park's posted hours of operation be from 8:00 a.m. to sundown daily. (Adjacent residents may choose to turn a blind eye to earlier usage that is quiet and non-disruptive, but having posted hours that start at 8:00 a.m. will provide grounds for ticketing and enforcement by Public Safety if people are being loud in the park early in the mornings.)

Site uses deemed incompatible by City Council vote

Dog park: Responding to overwhelming negative neighborhood feedback, the City Council voted 7-0 in February 2023 to cancel the proposed study issue for placing an off-leash dog park within the Ramona plot. Five councilmembers mentioned in their public comments on the record at the time of the vote that they felt the site was an inappropriate location for a dog park given factors like the small size of the plot, noise, smell, and the inability to provide sufficient offsets from adjacent homes. Cherry Chase Neighborhood appreciates and fully supports this decision and requests that the Parks and Recreation Commission respect the City Council's decision and expressed sentiment and not revisit the proposal to create an off-leash dog park within the rights-of-way.

Manifestly unsafe activities

- Utilities give varying guidance on how close drones may fly to high-tension power lines, but it appears that drones should keep at least 100 feet away from high-tension power lines at a bare minimum. Therefore, drones should not be flown in any of these plots.
- It is also completely unsafe to fly kites anywhere near or under high-tension power lines, so kites should not be flown in any of these plots.

Potential uses the neighborhood requests be disallowed

The neighborhood requests that the following uses not be approved for the rights-of-way because they would create unacceptable levels of noise pollution for the adjacent homes and the plots are too small to provide meaningful offsets:

- basketball court (due to noise from rebounding of ball off the backboard)
- pickleball court
- skateboard park
- use of speakers or sound amplifiers at any time except by city permit in conjunction with special events

Prevention of illegal camping

The City Council recently passed an ordinance that established opening and closing hours for all parks. This ordinance gives the City the legal ability to enforce its laws against illegal camping in city parks. Therefore we do not anticipate that illegal camping will pose a problem.

Summary

The Cherry Chase rights-of-way have long served as unofficial play areas for local children. By turning them into simple official parks, we have the opportunity to provide a new community benefit, place the usage of this site by residents on a clear legal footing, and experiment with a new Agile approach to park definition and development and the creation of a park that has been designed with adaptation to climate change in mind from the outset. We ask that Pacific Gas and Electric, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Sunnyvale City Council work together to rapidly realize this vision at low cost but with great community benefit.

Eric Krock, 755 Ramona Ave, Sunnyvale

Last updated 11 November 2026

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need additional open space in Sunnyvale?

According to the City Arborist, the City of Sunnyvale has a goal of maintaining 5.17 acres of open space per 10,000 residents.[25] Rezoning of the El Camino Precise Plan to enable mixed-use developments with high-density housing and the Baylands addition of tens of thousands of new units create a need for additional open space. Converting the closed rights-of-way to parkland can support this goal.

Will Cherry Chase Natural Park duplicate Greenwood Manor Park?

No. As a natural park with drought-tolerant landscaping, Cherry Chase Natural Park will provide a user experience that's complementary to the traditional green lawn of Greenwood Manor Park. It also provides more surface area to support uses like kickball, T-ball, and softball that Greenwood Manor Park is too small for.

Why do we need additional park space in Cherry Chase neighborhood?

The rights-of-way have always been used unofficially by neighborhood children as play spaces. Turning the plots into official parks would simply put that existing practice on a solid legal and institutional framework. With the City of Sunnyvale having re-zoned all of El Camino Real for what will be 6-8 story high-density housing (once state density bonuses are factored in), we'll need more park space than Greenwood Manor Park provides. And if we DON'T turn these plots into parks, they'll just sit there behind fencing without formal public access, providing minimal benefit, which is a missed opportunity.

Why should we turn BOTH target plots into parks? Isn't that duplicative?

We propose to open up the two target plots one at a time in a logical order according to 1) amount of benefit provided, and 2) difficulty and expense of converting each plot. Plus, we propose to provide diverse services across the two target plots, all of which are complementary to each other and to those available from Greenwood Manor Park. For example, Ramona plot

[25] Statement at 12 June 2023 Sunnyvale Urban Forest Association meeting.

could have the casual dirt sports area and a casual dirt soccer area with Miyawaki forest on either side; and Dona plot might have the community vegetable garden.

Won't the various proposed uses conflict with each other?

As the example layout indicates, the various uses can be distributed across the three plots in a way that each use is given enough space but the various proposed uses don't conflict with each other.

Will we have to worry about illegal camping?

In the past (e.g. when there was an encampment at Fair Oaks Park), the City of Sunnyvale felt that it could not enforce its prohibition on overnight camping because its parks did not have defined opening and closing hours. City Council has since passed an ordinance establishing opening and closing hours for all parks, so Public Safety can now legally enforce the prohibition against overnight camping in public parks,[26] which is what the plots would become. Therefore, if any unhoused people start camping there, we can just inform them that the park closes nightly and they'll need to find a different place to sleep. We can provide them the addresses of available shelters that accept new people in need of shelter. People not comfortable doing so can inform Public Safety if they observe illegal camping, and Public Safety will enforce the ordinance in a compassionate process that involves an initial informational visit, then informing them of intent to enforce the ordinance, and finally removing an illegal encampment if the person doesn't comply.[27] We believe that experience shows that this approach works in keeping Sunnyvale parks free of illegal camping. Homelessness is a tragedy, but trying to illegally camp overnight in a public park in violation of city ordinance is not allowed. Unhoused people need to avail themselves of a legal option such as staying in a shelter, getting into transitional housing programs, and seeking assistance for any issues that may have contributed to them becoming unhoused in some cases.

[26] Jim Stark, Department of Parks and Recreation, City of Sunnyvale.
[27] Jim Stark, Department of Parks and Recreation, City of Sunnyvale.

Will we have to worry about illegal drug use?

We don’t think so. These plots will wind up similar in nature to the adjacent Greenwood Manor Park. They will be simple, open neighborhood-use parks. State law does not allow public use of drugs, even for marijuana. We haven't seen an ongoing problem with drug use in Greenwood Manor Park. (There was a brief period years ago where some people were smoking marijuana outdoors, which is a ticketable offense, for some reason, but they stopped doing that, and if it happens again we can notify Public Safety to enforce the prohibition.) Since we don't see a problem now in Greenwood Manor Park, we don't see why extending Greenwood Manor Park with a set of natural park plots would attract more drug users. If it does, anyone is free to report the problem to Public Safety. Adjacent homeowners such as myself will also have the legal right to install cameras on our property that are pointed into the park should we wish to (because it will be public land), so we have the option of creating an enclosing camera network that both adjacent residents and Public Safety can be given access to should we wish. So frankly, we could turn this into the one place you DON'T want to be illegally consuming drugs in public!

Will Cherry Chase Natural Park cause excessive demand for on-street parking?

We don't think parking demand will pose a problem. This park is designed to be a low-intensity park. We aren't proposing a bathroom, so people won't tend to come for long stays. One of the (many) big concerns about the recently-killed dog park proposal was that people exercise their dogs **every single day**, so if you got 100 dog owners from outside walking distance who liked the dog park, that would have been 100 cars per day driving in, parking, and driving out from a residential side street. But neighborhood greenbelt parks such as we're proposing don't seem to cause that kind of intensive every-day use over and over by the same people from outside walking distance. Greenwood Manor Park is a great example. It's been open for decades, but we don't see it causing a parking problem. People do occasionally drive from outside walking distance to use it (usually bringing children), which is of course legal and fine, but they don't do so with a frequency and intensity that has ever caused Greenwood Manor Park to be seen as a source of parking trouble.

Endorsements of plan from related community organizations

Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates took a board vote and formally endorsed this plan in June 2023.

Support from members of related community organizations

The following individuals active in related community organizations have submitted personal statements of support for this proposal to the Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation Commission. Organizational affiliations are cited for identifying purposes only.

- Mary Brunkhorst, President, Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates
- Elisa Floyd, member, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action

Signatories

All signatories live in Sunnyvale unless otherwise specified. To be added as a signatory to the plan, email your full name, desired public name format, full street address, email, and phone # to ericweb@mail.com and ask to be added. Only your name (in the public name format you specify) will be added to the public list of signatories. The other information will be kept so that we (and perhaps in the future, the City of Sunnyvale, acting in its official capacity with appropriate information privacy controls) can audit and verify the list of signatories if that becomes necessary at some point in the public review process to confirm the level of Sunnyvale resident support for the proposal, and so that we can contact you regarding the proposal. This section will be filled out in full once we've gone through the community input and review process, gotten a final proposal draft, and circulated it for review and virtual signatures, but people are free to request addition to the list or removal from the list at any time.

2024-02-12 Sara Peek, Idit Kosti
2023-03-04 Vivian Yang, Eric Krock
2023-06-11 W. Zeng, Skylar Suorez, Josepha Suorez
2023-06-13 Mary Brunkhorst, Kimberly Walter, Michelle Hornberger

2023-06-15 Maggie Z, Ramya Villapuram

2023-07-30 Sri Satyararpu, Kaushik S, Cindy Meek, Juan Saa, Guadalupe Santa Maria, Alison de Geus, Jane Park, Govind Kamat, Lenore Cohen, Kathy Hays, Nitin Varshney, Govind Desale, James Li, Sam Dillon, Jaya Desale, Matt Napoli, David Allender, Jessica Hulse, Bridget Watson, Coburn Watson, Rohit Mitta, T. Mallie Brathwaite, Yingpei Wang

Privacy statement and handling of personal information

If you submit your personal information to Eric Krock or other volunteers working on this proposal, your personal information will not be sold/bartered/exchanged or used for any commercial purpose. Reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your personal information using the standard security features of commercial services we are using such as Google Suite. A limited number of volunteers working on this proposal may be granted access to some or all of your submitted personal information on a “need to know” basis in connection with their work on this project for purposes such as: maintaining physical and electronic mailing lists; maintaining lists of signatories, volunteers, and people who wish to be notified of proposal updates; informing you of actions you can take to support the proposal and get involved in working on it; and so on. Email ericweb@mail.com at any time if you want your personal information updated or removed from our records.

Draft of enabling City Council resolution

The City of Council of Sunnyvale finds that the two PG&E rights-of-way in Cherry Chase neighborhood between Ramona Ave and Lois Ave (“Ramona Plot”) and adjacent to Dona Ave (“Dona Plot”) are an underutilized resource that would be suitable for use as new mini-parks. Transforming these fenced-in rights-of-way into official city mini-parks will provide a valuable new benefit to the City of Sunnyvale and also clarify the legal status of the informal uses that have been made of these plots over past years, effectively managing and reducing whatever liability the City might otherwise have associated with such uses under the current legal structure. The City Council finds that it should be possible to transform these plots into simple parks at low cost in a step-by-step fashion without significant capital expenditure by using existing maintenance and ongoing services budgets in cooperation with Pacific Gas & Electric

Corporation. The City Council therefore directs the Sunnyvale Department of Parks and Recreation and other city departments such as Legal Counsel to use sufficient staff time to facilitate the transformation of these targeted plots into official city mini-parks in an open, inclusive process providing time for public input. The Department of Parks and Recreation, supported by Legal Counsel, is asked to negotiate a legally binding Memorandum of Understanding with PG&E that will document the legal responsibilities of the City of Sunnyvale and PG&E as these plots are transformed into city parks and after each plot has its status changed from its current status to an official city park. The Parks and Recreation Commission is asked to set up an oversight board of volunteer city residents who will participate in and facilitate the transformation of the plots into parks. Individual residents may take on responsibility for facilitating specific projects authorized by the Parks and Recreation Commission and/or Department of Parks and Recreation and/or may support the overall transformation process. The Parks and Recreation Commission is authorized to determine the size and membership of this board.

Draft of proposed Memorandum of Understanding between City of Sunnyvale and PG&E

Definitions

There are two plots of land in Cherry Chase Neighborhood of Sunnyvale, CA that are currently owned by Pacific Gas & Electric Corporation (hereafter, “PG&E”) with portions designated as easements of the City of Sunnyvale. These plots of land are located between Ramona Ave and Lois Ave (“Ramona Ave Plot”) and adjacent to Dona Ave (“Dona Plot”) underneath the PG&E high-tension power delivery lines that run overhead.

Agreement Goal

The City of Sunnyvale (hereafter, “City”) and PG&E agree to work together in good faith to change the two targeted plots of land over time into a new Sunnyvale city park to be known initially as “Cherry Chase Natural Park,” with the name to be chosen by the City thereafter through its ordinary park naming process.

Joint Responsibilities of City of Sunnyvale and PG&E

The City of Sunnyvale and PG&E will jointly review the two plots of land to verify their suitability for inclusion in the new park.

The City of Sunnyvale and PG&E find that these plots are in an urban core location and that vegetation management policies suitable to an urban core environment are appropriate and will jointly be used by the two parties from the effective date of this agreement forward. In particular, it is not considered necessary to eliminate all vegetation less than six feet in height to prevent the development of “fire ladders” because these plots are not located in the wilderness or on the wilderness-urban interface where wildfire danger is a far greater risk.

Enabling Legal Structure

Each targeted plot will be legally treated as an extension of the existing Greenwood Manor Park that is located adjacent to Ramona Ave and that is, like these two targeted plots of land, underneath PG&E high-tension wires.

Assumption of Liability for Park Use

The City of Sunnyvale will assume all legal liability associated with the maintenance and use of the land as a park. PG&E will continue to be responsible for maintaining its own overhead service delivery infrastructure, which will continue unchanged.

Site Improvements

In the process of reviewing the plots and planning their use as a park, the City and PG&E may determine by mutual agreement that certain improvements are desirable and may by mutual agreement assign responsibility for making such improvements. For example, the City might choose to remove specific dying or undesirable city trees from the city easements, or PG&E might choose to prune specific trees near its overhead power lines. PG&E might choose to remove unused obsolete infrastructure elements or to remove or better bury unused natural gas household service delivery lines.

City of Sunnyvale Responsibilities

City of Sunnyvale will ensure that PG&E continues to have all necessary access (including vehicle access through exterior fencing where present) to its overhead and ground-based infrastructure as it has today.

City of Sunnyvale will neither take any action nor authorize any action nor allow any action that interferes with PG&E's ability to access its infrastructure or that interferes with its ability to continue safely delivering power and supporting the delivery of other services such as telephony and cable TV and wireless access through its infrastructure.

City of Sunnyvale will take responsibility for vegetation management in each plot (except near overhead power lines) and will ensure that the vegetation is managed in such a way that it does not interfere with PG&E ground or overhead infrastructure elements.

PG&E Rights

PG&E shall continue to enjoy all legal rights it has had to date with respect to existing rights-of-way and service delivery. All existing PG&E rights-of-way shall continue to exist overhead and through all three plots as they have to date.

PG&E Responsibilities

PG&E shall continue to be responsible for maintaining its overhead (and where applicable, underground) service delivery infrastructure. Liability associated with that infrastructure shall be unchanged by this agreement.

Amendment

The City and PG&E may amend this agreement from time to time by mutual agreement in writing.

Works cited

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Additional Resources

- Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action
- Hancock Park Garden Club Joins LA Parks Foundation in Park Forest Experiment

Version history

11 Nov 2026: Updated to focus on Ramona Ave plot and Dona Ave plot; recorded “delay” request from PG&E

29 July 2023: V0.110: Created distinct nature pathway option. Added artwork.

2 July 2023: V0.109: Minor improvements and clarifications throughout. Added section Manifestly Unsafe Activities. Reworded references to “soccer field” to be inclusive of flag football and Ultimate.

16 Jun 2023: V0.108: Noted that city owns strips adjoining residences. Added city open space acreage requirement. Updated layout diagram. Wording improvements throughout.

10 Jun 2023: V0.107: Removed proposal for beehive based on evidence that European honeybees compete with native pollinators and it’s better to plant native plants to support native pollinators.

13 Mar 2023: V0.106: Swapped in improved render with drought-tolerant landscaping.

12 Mar 2023: V0.105: Minor legal and wording clarifications. Commented that PG&E could retain ownership of the plots if transferring them posed a problem.

5 Mar 2023: V0.104: Added: privacy statement; first signatories; FAQs; draft of enabling City Council resolution; draft of City/PG&E enabling Memorandum of Understanding; example layout.

2 Mar 2023: V0.103: Added: prevention of illegal camping; more detail about California deforestation and Miyawaki forests; more detail on Sunnyvale budget process.

26 Feb 2023: V0.102: Updated footnotes and added Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action as a resource.

25 Feb 2023: V0.101: added sections on: Greenwood/Ramona plot crosswalk; pocket forest/Miyawaki method; composting for neighbors and the community; climate change education; grants for urban greening; bird houses; bat house; beehive; critter cams; removal of dead tree stumps; screening vegetation between plots and adjacent homeowner backyards; limited hours because of proximity to residences; prohibited uses; bocce ball court.

21 Feb 2023: initial version