



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: January 22, 2025

DATE: January 13, 2025

TO: Open Space and Regional Parks Commission

FROM: Faye-Marie Pekar, Park Planner,
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THROUGH: Aaron Smith, Operations Division Director
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SUBJECT: Recommendation to adopt the revised 2024 Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan. Revisions include an expansion of 400 non-paved parking stalls in the North Parking Zone and language stating when new trees are added to the pasture area or the disc golf course, that Great Reno Balloon Races should be consulted on tree location and/or species to ensure no impediment on their event.
(Commissioner District 3 & 5).

SUMMARY

Washoe County, through its Community Services Department, has been working with Dig Studio and their team to update the Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan. The plan, founded on extensive stakeholder engagement and community outreach, presents a vision to guide future preservation, strategic development and redevelopment opportunities of the park, its facilities, open space management, accessibility, recreation programming, and amenities over the next 10-20 years. The document also identifies an implementation matrix for short, medium and long-term priorities and proposes strategies to see those priorities realized.

The recommended improvements include an enhanced pedestrian circulation and access plan to the park and extended trail system, signage and wayfinding upgrades, special event parking, identifies public art display locations, reimagining of the Nevada Farms and Families area, proposed development of a family friendly destination adventure playground, indoor tennis and pickleball facility, community amphitheater outdoor event space, expansion of the Arboretum towards North McCarran and a mini skatepark and dirt bike pump track.

After the adoption of the 2024 Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan by Parks Commission on November 20th, 2024, Great Reno Ballon Race (GRBR) Board raised concerns regarding the Master Plan and impacts that it may have on its future events primarily concerning the amount of parking spaces available for their event and future placement of trees within the pasture and disc golf areas of the park. Washoe County Parks staff, Dig Studio and GRBR Board met in December and discussed these concerns and agreed upon minor revisions to the master plan which include; 1.) expansion of 400 flex parking stalls in the North Parking Zone adjacent to North McCarran Blvd and North

Virginia Street, creating a net positive of 103 parking stalls within the final buildout, 2.) language stating when new trees are added to the pasture area or the disc golf course, that GRBR should be consulted on tree location and/or species to ensure no impediment on their event. GRBR Board has reviewed and agreed to these minor revisions to the master plan.

Strategic Objective supported by this item: Fiscal Sustainability. Long-Term Sustainability.

PREVIOUS ACTION

November 20, 2024 – The Washoe County Parks Commission adopted the 2024 Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan which includes but it not limited to a prioritized project action list, implementation strategy, maintenance strategies, potential funding avenues for implementation and maintenance, and overall future park management.

June 11, 2002 – The Washoe County Board of County Commissioners (Board) adopted the 2002 Rancho San Rafael Implementation Plan.

May 15, 2002 – The Washoe County Parks Commission recommended approval to the Board the 2002 Implementation approval.

1990- Original Master Plan for Rancho San Rafael Regional Park revised.

1982 – Original Master Plan for Rancho San Rafael Regional Park created.

BACKGROUND

Rancho San Rafael Regional Park consists of 575 acres that forms one of the largest landscaped parks in northern Nevada. The park is located northwest of downtown Reno where North McCarran Blvd bisects the park into a northern and southern section. The park includes Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APN's) 002-040-27, 002-030-10, 002-030-08, 002-020-06, 002-020-08, 002-020-15, 002-030-09, 002-030-07, 002-020-17, 082-631-13 and 003-130-51. Two APNs, 082-631-13 and 003-130-51, are adjacent to open space parcels administered by the United States Forest Service that continues the parks extensive trail system to the north, consisting of the Keystone Canyon and Evan Canyon trailheads at the base of Peavine Mountain.

Rancho San Rafael was the last ranch in northwest Reno and the initial 408 acres of park was purchased with a 9-million-dollar bond issue approved by Washoe County voters in 1979 protecting the land from private development. In 1993, the park was enlarged by 120 acres from a gift by William and Barbara Thornton, and in 1998, a land exchange added another 46 acres in Keystone Canyon to the west of the park. The park offers diverse landscapes including native pasture grasses, wetlands and high desert with sections that have noxious and invasive weeds. Resident birds live in the riparian areas, including raptors and owls. Late fall sees the arrival of Canada geese on the pastures and developed lawn areas. Mule deer, bobcat, and coyote are present in the northern part of the park area adjacent to the larger range.

In 2022 the park had over 3.5 million visitors and is well known regionally as the site of numerous community events including the Great Reno Balloon Race, Dragon Lights and other special events throughout the year. Additional park amenities include the Wilbur D.

May Museum and Wilbur D. May Arboretum & Botanical Garden, the visitor center, historic Ranch House, Nevada Farms and Families Area, Herman's Pond, a disc golf course, multi-use pasture area for off-leash dog use, miles of trails, five reservable picnic pavilions, two reservable buildings, five reservable gardens, dozens of individual sites, a Basque Shepherder Monument, Reno Sports Complex, and a new fitness court.

Rancho San Rafael Regional Park has undergone two previous master planning efforts. The first in 1982 with a subsequent Master Plan update completed in 1990. In June of 2002, an Implementation Plan of the park was completed. These master plans are outdated and an updated master plan, based on community and stakeholder input, is required to move forward with any additional park development to ensure conformity with the community's current and future recreational needs.

In February of 2024, Washoe County hired Dig Studio to help facilitate the development of the updated Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan. The plan development process began with an initial site analysis to identify opportunities as well as constraints. While analyzing existing conditions at the park, public outreach was conducted through meetings with stakeholder groups, community outreach, public meetings, interactive maps and surveys to ask what existing amenities the community would like to see improved and what new improvements they would like to see built in the park.

Based on the first round of surveys and initial stakeholder discussions, conceptual plans were developed for review and were presented at the first public outreach event held on April 28th. A second survey was then opened to garner additional feedback. The conceptual plans were then refined into a preferred concept that was presented at the second public outreach open house meeting on July 31. Based on input from the second public meeting, stakeholder feedback, the survey poll and other written and oral comments received, the final master plan was then developed.

The proposed master plan recommends a variety of improvements while also seeking to maintain undeveloped open space and native vegetation. Proposed new infrastructure includes enhanced pedestrian circulation and access plan to the park and extended trail system, signage and wayfinding upgrades, identifies public art display locations, reimagining of the Nevada Farms and Families area, proposed development of a family friendly destination adventure playground, indoor tennis and pickleball facility, community amphitheater outdoor event space, expansion of the Arboretum towards North McCarran and a mini skatepark and dirt bike pump track.

After the adoption of the 2024 Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan by Parks Commission on November 20th, 2024, Great Reno Ballon Race (GRBR) Board raised concerns regarding the Master Plan and impacts that it may have on its future events primarily concerning the amount of parking spaces available for their event and future placement of trees within the pasture and disc golf areas of the park. Washoe County Parks staff, Dig Studio and GRBR Board met in December and discussed these concerns and agreed upon minor revisions to the master plan which include; 1.) expansion of 400 flex parking stalls in the North Parking Zone adjacent to North McCarran Blvd and North Virginia Street, creating a net positive of 103 parking stalls within the final buildout, 2.) language stating when new trees are added to the pasture area or the disc golf course, that GRBR should be consulted on tree location and/or species to ensure no impediment on

their event. GRBR Board has reviewed and agreed to these minor revisions to the master plan.

Consistency with the 2019 Regional Parks and Open Space Master Plan.

Rancho San Rafael Regional Park sits within the Peavine Planning Area as identified in the 2019 Regional Parks and Open Space Master Plan. One of the goals for this planning area is to further development Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. The 2019 Parks Master Plan also includes several objectives and strategies directly related to the current proposal including Objective 1.A: Preserve and enhance existing regional parks, Objective 2.B: Develop and update a master plan specific to each regional park, and Objective 3.A: Collaborate with other departments, agencies, organizations and private developers to meet the identified priorities. Additionally, one of the overarching goals of the 2019 Plan is to focus resources on regional parks rather than investing in smaller pocket parks and community parks. The current proposed master plan is consistent with these priorities.

FISCAL IMPACT

A change order request in the amount of \$3000.00 was created for the additional coordination efforts with the Great Reno Balloon Race master plan revisions beyond the original scope of work for the park master plan.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended the Open Space and Regional Park Commission adopt the revised 2024 Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan. Revisions include an expansion of 400 non-paved parking stalls in the North Parking Zone and language stating when new trees are added to the pasture area or the disc golf course, that Great Reno Balloon Races should be consulted on tree location and/or species to ensure no impediment on their event.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the Board agree with staff's recommendation, a possible motion would be: "Move to recommend the Board of County Commissioners adopt the revised 2024 Rancho San Rafael Regional Park Master Plan. Revisions include expansion of 400 non-paved parking stalls in the North Parking Zone and language stating when new trees are added to the pasture area or the disc golf course, that Great Reno Balloon Races should be consulted on tree location and/or species to ensure no impediment on their event."