City of Sebastopol
Planning Commission Staff Report

Meeting Date: October 13, 2015
Agenda Item: 9A
To: Planning Commission
From: Kenyon Webster, Planning Director
Subject: Draft Laguna Preserve Management Plan
Recommendation: Recommend Approval of the Plan to the City Council

Introduction:

Pursuant to City Council direction, a draft Laguna de Santa Rosa Preserve Management Plan has been prepared in a public process. One of the Planning Commission’s roles is to review park policy and park improvement projects. The Commission is requested to review the proposed Plan, and make any recommendations to the City Council.

Background:

The City’s Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve has been created over a number of years following adoption of the 1992 Laguna Park Master Plan.

The Master Plan created a vision for protection and enhancement of the Laguna in the Sebastopol area, and guided the later creation of the Laguna Preserve. The Preserve is not intended to be an intensely developed or active recreation area; rather it is intended to focus on maintaining and restoring natural ecological functions and values, with some low-impact public access.

The primary purpose of the Preserve is not to meet human needs; rather it is focused on protection and restoration of natural functions. A secondary focus is provision of low-impact public access.

The Preserve has been developed in multiple stages on several distinct properties beginning in 1998, transforming areas once used for waste disposal (a City dump; a sewage treatment plant; an apple waste disposal area) into a valued ‘natural’ public park. Thousands of native trees and shrubs have been planted, and several miles of trails developed.

The Preserve includes the following City-owned lands:

- Areas surrounding the Laguna Youth Park/Community Center/Youth Annex
- Areas west of the Laguna channel and east of Morris Street, behind (in some cases) private property fronting on Morris Street
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- Meadowlark Field, north of Highway 12 on the east side of the Laguna channel

- The City’s newest park, Tomodachi Park, next door to the Village Mobile Home site

- The Railroad Forest, located north of the Joe Rodota Trail

The City developed the Preserve with a combination of local funding, volunteers, and grants from numerous sources. Several major grants have been received, including from the California Coastal Conservancy, State Parks, and the Wildlife Conservation Board.

A major funding partner was the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, which helped the City purchase the Railroad Forest and Tomodachi Park properties, provided a major restoration grant at Meadowlark Field, and provided substantial funding for construction of Tomodachi Park. Conservation easements were recorded to protect the values of lands where the District provided the City with financial assistance. The City is obligated to maintain these values, and the District has asked the City to prepare a management plan to set forth its protocols for maintenance, restoration and improvement of the properties with District easements. As the Laguna Preserve sites without such easements have the same environmental and management issues, the Management Plan also encompasses those properties.

As detailed in the draft Plan and in public comment, there are issues regarding maintenance, invasive species, illegal camping, lack of identity, insufficient connectivity, and appropriate restoration/improvement protocols.

As the Preserve has been in operation for a number of years, the City Council felt that it would be appropriate to undertake a comprehensive review of conditions, needs, and opportunities. Using Special Sales tax monies, the City Council set aside funding in this year’s budgeting to prepare a Laguna Preserve Management Plan. After a competitive selection process, Prunuske Chatham and subcontractor the Laguna Foundation were retained to prepare the Plan.

Project objectives include:
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• Inventory and describe the Preserve properties including all natural habitats and human infrastructure;

• Summarize existing City plans and policies relating to the Preserve;

• Summarize other applicable regulations;

• Summarize existing restrictions applying to Preserve properties, such as Open Space easements;

• Identify issues and opportunities for restoration/enhancement and public access;

• Identify target condition of properties;

• Set forth best management practices for resource management and erosion control;

• Identify maintenance needs;

• Set forth protocols for improvements, such as native plant restoration projects and trails;

• Provide a general framework for monitoring, preserving, protecting, improving, and maintaining Preserve resources;

• Describe the City’s long-term plan for on-going management;

• Identify appropriate elements of an on-going maintenance program;

• Provide estimates of annual staffing and budgeting needs.

The public process to date has included a presentation to the Planning Commission, and an initial public workshop to identify issues and receive public input, and a ‘walking workshop’ to gather further input. Information has been provided in the City newsletter, and in widely-distributed bulletins to interested persons and organizations. There has also been outreach to regula-
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tory and other agencies, and technical revisions were included in the draft Plan in response to some agency comments.

A major intent of the Plan is to determine if the City should consider different maintenance protocols, and/or budget additional resources. While in a number of cases jurisdictions may have funding for capital improvements, provision of on-going maintenance resources is sometimes lacking. Often, long-term maintenance needs are insufficiently appreciated. The Plan indicates that additional maintenance resources are needed to appropriately maintain the Preserve. This is expected to be a budget consideration for the City Council.

Grant Application:

There has been a dearth of grant opportunities for park projects until recently. A major, time-sensitive opportunity was identified with the River Parkways grant program, and using information developed in the draft Plan, City and Laguna Foundation staff collaborated on a grant proposal for nearly $500,000 to fund Preserve restoration, interpretive and wayfinding signs, and the connectivity improvements identified in the draft Plan. The application is pending.

Environmental Review:

The proposed use is categorically exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to Section 15307, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for the Protection of Natural Resources, in that the primary intent of the Plan is protection of natural resources; and Section 15301, Existing Facilities, in that the Plan is addressing an existing public park, and also identifies minor restoration and trail improvement projects (while not implementing such projects).

Public Comment: Appendix 7 in the Plan provides detailed comments that were provided through the initial outreach process. An attachment to this report summarizes comments from the 'walking workshop.'

Other public comments (attached) have also been provided for the Commission's consideration.

Analysis:

Below is staff's analysis regarding some of the major issues raised in the public process.
Objective of Preserve. Some comments express the opinion that human needs and improvements should receive higher priority. Per the 1992 Laguna Park Plan, the intent, or policy purpose of the Preserve is restoration and protection of the natural Laguna environment—with human access/improvements minimized, or secondary.

As stated in the 1992 Master Plan: "The main focus of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Park is Laguna environments preservation and restoration..." This principle has guided development of the Management Plan. Low impact public access and education is an appropriate element in the Preserve, but is intended to be secondary to protection and restoration of natural features. At times in the Preserve’s history it has been a challenge to maintain the Preserve’s values and objectives when there are legitimate 'improvement' ideas that may serve other needs. Thus, some concepts such as removing natural vegetation to uncover railroad tracks or to provide kayak access are not recommended.

Himalayan Blackberry Removal. A comment suggests this is not a priority in the Plan. Himalayan blackberry is listed in the Plan as one of the top priority invasive species for removal throughout the Preserve, including Railroad Forest. Its removal is called out as a key component of Restoration Opportunities B (Youth Park Northwest Corner), E (Youth Park Southwest Corner), F (AmeriCorps Trail near Lift Station), and G (Railroad Forest).

Public Access. A comment suggested the Plan does not provide adequate public access. As noted, the primary purpose of the Preserve is environmental protection and restoration; modest, low-impact access is also appropriate, but should be limited. Improved public access to the Preserve is addressed in a number of ways, including the proposed addition of two new connector trails. See Section 8, pp. 64-72.

Public Input/Plan proposals. A comment suggested that the Plan did not adequately reflect the range of public input, including ideas for improvements. As noted, the Management Plan is guided by, and intended to maintain the vision of the Laguna Park Master Plan. Some ideas for improvements that were expressed in the public process would be in conflict with this vision.

Open Space District easements. Where they have provided funding for land acquisition, restoration, or improvements, the District is dedicated to maintain the conservation values of the subject property. The District requires permanent easements to restrict uses and improvements, and conducts annual property inspections, and also is required to review improvement proposals. The District rightly takes these responsibilities seriously, and has effective
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authority to deny project proposals. Certain volunteer activities in the Railroad Forest were of significant concern to the District as being in possible conflict with the District's view of conservation values, and were part of the reason why the District asked that the City develop a management plan for how affected properties should be maintained and improved.

Other Comments. Some comments with technical information or corrections were received; the City's consultants will review these and make appropriate revisions to the final Plan.

Key Issues for Commission Consideration:

Key issues include:

- Whether Plan has sufficient information about Preserve resources, issues, and opportunities
- Whether the planned restoration and improvement projects are appropriate, and whether additional improvements should be considered
- Whether the Commission has any comments on the estimates of maintenance needs

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Commission receive any public comment, discuss the draft Plan, formulate any comments or suggested revisions, and forward the Plan to the City Council for their consideration.

Attachments:

Summary of comments from the September 12 workshop
Public comments
**Public Input from Meeting 2, September 12, 2015 Walking Workshop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
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<tr>
<td>At start of Americorps Trail: move sign away from center of entrance; point toward trail with arrow. Currently it doesn't look like a trailhead, just a stopping point to get dog waste bags.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider a short boardwalk across the drainage just south of that trail junction. That section remains muddy even after the other low-lying parts are dry enough for comfortable walking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make Americorps entrance gentler. The steep grade at the beginning would be easy to cut back to an easier one -- there is plenty of room between the start of the steep slope and the main trail junction. This job could be done by a couple of volunteers in 2-3 hours max.</td>
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<td>For lift station vehicle access: install taller bollards to discourage people from walking across chain and encourage them to walk around it; current chain height is a trip hazard</td>
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<td>For proposed Tomodachi/Rodota connector trail: fence sides of narrow footpath with interpretive signs explaining the native habitat</td>
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<td><strong>No new trail at Tomodachi; avoid impacts to habitat.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Install Port-a-Potty at Americorps Trail to improve sanitation with campers; or restroom at pump station</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remove buried pipe at start of Americorps Trail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Install permanent bridge to replace floating bridge</td>
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<td>Develop walking trail under Hwy 12 bridge</td>
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<td>Develop Adopt-a-Trail program</td>
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<td>Advertise suggested walks for tourists</td>
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<td>Acquire the cement plant</td>
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<td>Provide bike access to Tomodachi</td>
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<td><strong>Engage the high school kids, Girl/Boy Scouts; make them partners in stewardship/preservation</strong></td>
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<td>Use signs to explain why dogs must stay on leash</td>
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<td>Interest in and questions about kayak access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Meadowlark trail along Hwy 12 to bikes to provide a corridor for bikes to get from Sebastopol to the Laguna Trail. Relatively low impact to birds/wildlife given low habitat quality due to road proximity. Consider trail connection from east side of HWY 12 bridge sidewalk onto Meadowlark, maybe only seasonal. (Plan suggests revisiting pedestrian trail connection from sidewalk to Meadowlark after bridge is complete, but doesn't specify that bikes be allowed.)</td>
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<td>Could the City regularly provide large trash bags to the homeless? The City is no longer stocking the Plaza trash cans with bags because the homeless folks remove them, then dump the trash elsewhere in order to use the bags [and presumably to look for recyclables]. This is a major reason why there is so much trash around the camps. [Note from Joan: We were told this spring that the City was still providing trash bags to campers in RR Forest.]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze old dump contents under ball fields in case they are leaching toxins into Laguna</td>
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<td>Resolve camping problems before spending more money on preserve. Police should clear out campers weekly or bi-weekly.</td>
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Dear Kenyon et al.,

My first concern is with the actual water quality of the Laguna. It appears brown/green and has almost no clarity at all. I know it is subject to a lot of nutrient loading, sediment deposits and runoff, and with the drought all those issues are exacerbated, but what do local water experts know about the water quality and how can it be improved? To me, that is the most important issue and I just can’t ignore it and go on to other “human use” concerns, such as recreation, new trails etc.

Secondly, my impression is that Sebastopol in general seems to think of itself as a drought-free zone. The Laguna Youth Park is flooded every morning, with large puddles and rivers of irrigation water everywhere! The grassy area of Ives Park is soaked, almost muddy and the area around the Teen center (I forget the proper “new” name) has puddles and water all over the asphalt. Also the Youth Park is full of plastic trash even though there are abundant trash containers. In the event of wind or weather, this can end up in the Laguna itself.

To top it off, water trucks fill their 3,500 gallon tanks one after the other all day long, everyday and haul water off to faraway places for pay. Yesterday I was behind a full truck that had no cap on the tank and was spilling water all over the road as it drove off down Morris St!

If we keep drawing down the aquifer that supports the Laguna in this extended drought, we may be damaging the whole Laguna system beyond repair and exacerbating the water quality and quantity issue that are already serious concerns. We have already polluted, destroyed and abused this beautiful waterway that so many other species depend on. This waterway is only a shadow of its former abundant beauty already. We need to drastically change our relationship to it or we may lose it entirely in the next few years as in some places we already have, due to nutrient loading and invasive plants. I suggest that Sebastopol stop watering grass and landscaping, or cut the watering by 50% immediately and stop selling water by the 3,500 gallon truck.

I suggest that Sebastopol stop allowing the Laguna Foundation to manage the uplands. I haven’t seen any real benefits from all their efforts and restoration programs. We were better off before they started to “improve” things. They have added a lot of plastic to the area in the form of plastic weed barriers, plastic ties and flags and irrigation parts just laying around out there. I’m always cleaning up their plastic garbage. I spoke to them about it several times and made no progress. (They just acted like the big bureaucracy that they are.) Now they sprayed Telar XP in a few areas including Meadowlark and took down the warning signs immediately so that park users are now unaware that they are exposing themselves to carcinogenic poison, as it can take as long as 2 years to work its way through all the soil and water. Please read Bob Rawson’s comments on spraying herbicides. I sent that to you in my previous email.

I believe allowing cattle to graze on the Laguna has done the most damage due to the nutrient runoff that cause the pollution that invasive plants thrive on. Cow manure and urine DO NOT BELONG IN THE LAGUNA! The Laguna should not be treated as a toilet bowl for cows!

I love this area and I am on the Laguna trails frequently. It is a very special place to me and an essential feature of our area. We should treat it as the jewel and abundant source of life and beauty that it truly is. Hopefully these comments are relevant and helpful.

Thank you for reading this, for sharing it and for all that you do to protect the Laguna.

Karin Lease

On Aug 28, 2015, at 12:15 PM, Kenyon Webster <kwebster@cityofsebastopol.org> wrote:

Greetings on this warm and muggy day!

For those interested in Sebastopol happenings, attached are:

- A flyer for a “walking workshop” at the Laguna Preserve to help highlight issues and gather comments on Saturday, September 12 from 10am to 12pm. This is part of the process for the Laguna Preserve Management Plan, a draft of which will be released shortly.

- The latest City of Sebastopol newsletter.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

-Kenyon Webster

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kwebster@ci.sebastopol.ca
City of Sebastopol
Laguna Wetlands Preserve
Restoration & Management Plan
Public Meeting #2: On-Site Review

Saturday, September 12, 2015
10:00 am - noon
Laguna Youth Park
390 Morris Street, Sebastopol
Meet at the amphitheater/outdoor classroom
(just north of the Youth Annex, next to gravel parking lot).

Come walk through Sebastopol's Laguna Wetlands Preserve, learn what restoration and enhancement efforts the City is considering, and provide your input!

A draft restoration and management plan has been prepared for the Preserve (portions of the Laguna Youth Park, the Americorps Trail, Meadowlark Field, Tomodachi Park, and Railroad Forest). These lands along the Laguna have been protected to maintain ecological functions such as providing wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and groundwater recharge, and to provide low-impact public access. Since 1998, the City, its resource agency partners, and local volunteers have worked to restore habitat on and provide public access to these lands. The purpose of the plan is to provide cohesive guidance for caring for this Sebastopol treasure.

Please join us to visit locations of proposed enhancements, and to provide your input on:
- Restoration of diverse native riparian forest, valley oak savanna, and wetlands
- Signage to enhance Preserve visibility, and to engage and educate users
- New trail connections to improve Preserve access and enjoyment
- Opportunities for the public to engage in caring for the Preserve

If you are unable to attend but would like to contribute written comments, please contact Kenyon Webster, Planning Director, at kwebster@cityofsebastopol.org. The draft plan will be available on the City website for review starting approximately one week before the event.
Hi Kenyon:

I finally finished reading this very impressive plan (though not every word). It is just great & I hope lots of ideas can be implemented. My comments:

- In (at least) 3 places, Barn Swallows were said to be nesting on the Community Building….should be CLIFF SWALLOWS…pgs 45, 78, 117
- I was not familiar with the Native American Names in Cultural Area Pg. 37: With the Laguna Docents we refer to native Americans as Pomo & Coast Miwok
- On Cunningham Marsh, we have been fairly successful, though no in-depth studies have been done, with removing Him. Blackberry & replacing with Juncus. I can get more information if it is needed

Again, thanks for all the hard work by a lot of people. I will try to make the meeting on Oct. 13th.

Regards,

:) Marcia (Johnson) - an original & still Active Laguna Keeper.

owlsnesttwo@att.net
From:  Rick Coates rcoates@sonic.net
Subject: Laguna Management Plan
Date: October 6, 2015 at 5:05 PM
To: kwebster@cityofsebastopol.org

The Laguna Management Plan should include plans to naturalize Calder Creek from its conjunction with the Laguna to Petaluma Ave. The banks need to be sloped back and the blackberries removed.

Rick Coates
Executive Director
EcoRing
Promoting EcoTourism and Green Travel.
It's the Journey not the Destination!

707-632-6070 or rcoates@sonic.net

Please consider the environment before printing this email.
Of these 16 suggestion only blackberry removal acknowledged and only superficially

A beautiful environment for Sebastopol, south of the Hwy 12 bridge

It is said that all great towns rest on a significant body of water. Sebastopol is no exception. We are fortunate to have the Laguna channel through the most beautiful part of the Laguna that is right at the town’s doorstep. It is unfortunate that we have not taken care of it. The setting and waterway has such great potential. Lets hope this process is a beginning of making this area in to a beautiful natural environment – even a community showpiece.

This is area is a gateway to our town in one direction, and a gateway to the Laguna in he other – a prominent location that can affect how the feel about our town and how we value the Laguna. It is a ten minute walk from the town core that can take you into a completely different natural environment. Our community relishes and needs such places to walk, ride bikes, explore, kayak, play in a creek, and we have this place that can be all that so close. It is a most worth while project making this place a community treasure.

Following are 16 improvement suggestions for the City owned Laguna areas south of Hwy 12.

Lynn

1. Get rid of the blackberries

Get rid of the blackberries – all of them. They are an invasive that will persistently keep pushing to overtake this area and will, except for a few fast growing trees. They are wiping out the understory, block off access to the waterways, block views and scratch people. Unless you get them all, they will be back. Other plants, animals and people will all enjoy the entire area more with these blackberries gone – except the homeless residents living among them.

One of ten homeless camp sites cut into the blackberries in the RR Forest
Blackberries 10 feet high climbing through the trees

2. Expose the RR track
Hidden beneath blackberries in the RR Forest is the last remaining stretch of above ground RR track from the many miles that once ran through and around Sebastopol. Expose this two hundred yards of track so that one can walk the length. Replace the forty foot section that was unnecessarily removed when the trail was built so that passing trail users will touch and see this piece of our town's history. Here is a place to feature Sebastopol's significant RR History that was all but erased 30 years ago.

This is where a track section was removed was to make it more convenient to put the RR Forest Trail through.

3. Naturalize Calder Creek

From the Calder Creek outfall to a hundred feet past the bridge (600 feet) the creek has been channelized with highly compacted soils channelized into a straight line with steep banks. Remove this readily visible and accessible section of...
compacted soil, channeled into a straight line with steep banks. Return this newly visible and accessible portion of the creek to its more natural form. Cut the banks back to a gentle slope that will become covered with the sand that migrates from upstream. Make it a place where you can walk to the edge of the water, and a kid can build a dam.

The same should be done to the Laguna channel in Tomodachi Park in the areas that are most visible and accessible to park users. Here the bank is generally about four feet above water level with a 45 degree angle into the water.

Outfall of Calder Creek into the Railroad Forest

Mid section picture of the creek banks
Laguna channel at the most accessible area of Tomodachi Park. A steep bank into the water. There is no place to walk to the waters edge.

4. Create a front path
Create a foot path following Calder Creek – an intimate path that goes through the woods and touches the edge of the creek here and there. Start from the end of Barnes Road, meandering along the north side of the creek crossing to the south at the RR Forest Trail bridge, then follow the creek more or less going under the canopy of the large Oregon Ash and oaks. Cross under the Joe Rodota Trail next to the creek at the Calder Creek bridge and continue on to the Laguna Channel (now into county area). Bridge the channel (in the future) it is not too wide here. And continue on to the meadow’s edge where it can intersect the Brown Farm Trail the County plans to develop. From here one can walk to several other trails.

A path through the woods

5. Accommodate Kayaks in Laguna Channel

Accommodate kayaks in Tomodachi Park. 1) Provide a way for vehicles to get near the water and a gentle sloping sand bank to launch a kayak. 2) Clean up the short rubble filled and over grown water connection in the area under the Hwy 12 bridge so kayaks can go from the Park to the larger body of water of the Laguna Channel on the north side of the Hwy 12 bridge. 3) The waterway, south of the bridge has an excessive number of large willow branches overhanging and laying in the water. Some would need to be cleared to let kayaks go back into the interesting recesses in this direction. This would create nearly a mile long kayakable waterway.

You see a large number of kayaks on top of cars and stored in side yards around Sebastopol. However, the closest accessible waters around are a 45 minute drive way. This relatively inexpensive accommodation would create a pretty place to go for a quiet "stroll" on water at our town’s doorstep. Back in the 1920 era this waterway was larger and used by many for weekend canoe and row boat outings.
Some have managed to find a way into the Laguna channel. We should make it easy for all the community to enjoy this great resource.

Some potentially pretty and interesting kayakable areas of the channel are clogged with fallen willow branches.
Total blockage of channel
6. Inviting places

Create a few places that invite one to stop and sit to enjoy the surroundings. Place a table, a bench or a sitting logs in an attractive clearing. For the RR Forest three locations are suggested below, but there are others.

1) Between the tall valley oaks 100 feet to the left of the RR Forest Trail as you approach from Coffee Katz. These nicely shaped trees are prominent in the area trees and a clearing around them would show them off. Cleaned up, this location can bee seen at an entry to the RR Forest (from Coffee Katz direction) and would set a welcoming tone in contrast to the layers of dark and broken dead willow there now that should be cleared away.

2) At the the clearing west of the RR Forest Trail between the Calder Creek bridge and the Joe Rodotal Trail. It is pretty spot just off the trail from which you can see the Creek and the intersection with the JR Trail. A rough circle of redwood logs would provide a gathering spot/lunch spot for trail users, and something to lean a bike against. Lunch break for the cleanup crew, between bridge and trail intersection and close to creek.
3) Fifty yards east to the JR and RR Trail intersection is the well developed path through the blackberries leading to the popular homeless camping area along Calder Creek. These homeless have good taste in sites for they have picked a most attractive shaded glen. The area is canopied by large Oregon Ash, with the creek and the old RR track near by. While only 150 feet from the trail this spot feels like a far away retreat.
7. Bridge area planting

The Calder Creek bridge is a hang out of sorts, a frequent stopping spot along the RR Forest trail. Often one sees people rest against the railing and visit with others or take a break. Make the vistas down the creek beautiful. Line the banks with different ferns, flowers, and layer back with flowering dogwoods and a variety of pretty plants.

Discussing City business on the bridge
8. Block the view

In spring and summer the view from the RR Forest Trail makes you feel you are in a woods, however when the trees lose their leaves this changes. From above the fence around a storage yard a collection of equipment and motor homes shine in the sun. The second story of the hotel looks down on the trail from nearby. Screen these views off with live oaks or other trees that will block the nearby man made clutter in the winter months.

The hotel and industrial building and its stored clutter look over the fences and detract from the environment for five months a year when the trees are without leaves.
9. Trail vistas vs a wall

Where the Joe Rodota Trail passes along much of the RR Forest a person is presented with walls of foliage in an area where there could be scenic vistas. For many these walls of brush and berries makes the trail feel closed in and not as safe.
Clear and thin these areas back from the trail and opening up occasional vistas into the depths of the woods to allow passersby to see into the richness of this riparian area. This wall blocks it off.

Winter view of the foliage wall. In summer it appears solid and closer to the trail.
10. Replace the Arroyo Willow with a better kind of tree.

Some of the Laguna areas are thick with Arroyo Willow. It appears that these willows, particularly in the RR Forest, are overly prone to growing quickly and collapsing, the collapsed branches sprout new fast growing branches which develop into trees and collapse again. The process builds up dead thickets and creates fire hazards, maintenance problems, and dams in the creek when the branches collect upstream trash. Not all willow varieties behave like this. Work in these varieties as replacements.

Typical, This new branch collapsed a week after the area was cleared of broken down limbs.

A dam created by collapsing willow and debris, one of several
RR Forest willow that is falling apart creating a mass of firewood
11. Display the rubble wall

Standing about the center of the RR Forest Trail looking west one can see the standout white of a few big chunks of concrete. Much more concrete is hidden under foliage in a 10 foot cliff. Some of the concrete chunks are massive and you wonder how they were moved here. This wall is at the end of a filled plateau located in the general area behind the old Ford dealership. This too, is a part of the history of Sebastopol, a history of the town’s changed geography, and attitudes that a riparian area was something to be filled to make it useful. This rubble should be cleared and exposed for it is interesting in it’s history, it’s crude but attractive look and it’s stark contrast to the surrounding greenery.

12. Bring back old train cars

Hidden away in places like Milrick Brothers on Lone Pine and the Petaluma train yard are old RR cars that used to frequent Sebastopol. Place three cars together on the track (noted above) near the RR Forest Trail – a dramatic piece
Frequent Sebastopol, please three cars together on the track (notes above) near the RR Forest Trail – a dramatic piece of art and a way to showcase our history in a real context.

The local trolley, restored, now in Rio Vista.

The trail down Main Street, Sebastopol, turning toward the RR Forest. Early 80’s.
13. Meadow improvement

In Tomodachi Park, a scenic meadow is located pleasantly away from the constant sound of Hwy 12 traffic, but is unusable for people. The course plants (perhaps invasive) and rough ground make it hard to traverse. Make this area a walkable, playable field, and put a quieter picnic area at the far end.

Meadow at Tomodachi Park – behind benches.

14. Trail under new bridge

Sebastopol’s Laguna Wetlands Trail is only 800 feet from the Joe Rodota Trail, but to get from one to the other takes miles of travel. If there was a direct connection between these two trails it would link together many trail systems, existing and planned. It would make it so one could safely walk or bike from Sebastopol to the popular Laguna De Santa Rosa Trail. The key to this connection is a trail under the new Hwy 12 bridge.

The time to do the under bridge foundation for the trail is when the bridge is being built, by working with the bridge contractor, hopefully. The heavy equipment, roads in, cement pumps, manpower etc are all there. Putting this off will
make this little stretch of trail much more complicated and expensive. This planning needs to start soon!

800 feet and a bridge between these two trails

15. The City of Sebastopol should own this lot.

The Village Park and Rail Road Forest properties really do include the prettiest part of the of the whole Laguna. At the south vertex of of these two parcels is a two acre open field with one prominent oak tree. The City of Sebastopol should own this lot. This lot is in the City Limit, above the 100 year flood line, and all buildable. It is zoned Commercial. It will be developed.

When it does get developed it will be either for the maximum return on investment, or, for the maximum benefit of the community – two very different goals. The property is unique. It is the last open piece of property between the City and the Laguna. Existing development has literally walled off the Laguna from our town from hotel to hotel visually and physically. Sebastopol has many community needs that this property could accommodate, things that will invite the community into this property, and the City can develop the property in a way that features the Laguna instead of shutting it off.

Developable open two acre field at the corner between two City owned parcels
Tan area is the lot shown above.
16. Ponds/marsh and overflow

Create seasonal ponds. In the area where Calder Creek goes under the bridge on the RR Forest Trail the water level of the creeks is actually higher than the surrounding lands. In high waters Calder Creek overflows its banks and the water flows off in a different direction. The area around the bridge has three locations where 100+ foot pond can be easily built. Winter overflow will fill them. If the Sebastopol Inn or future development close by had a grey water system supplying these ponds, they could flourish year round.

Silverton Oregon has done something similar to this with an added attraction. A local volunteer group created and maintains beautiful flower gardens in and around similar ponds. They have become town attraction. These ponds would be close to our town and easily viewed from both trails.

Ponds similar to this one could be developed near the JR and RR Forest Trails
Laguna Restoration Plan, General Comments

A great deal of information is provided with much detail and many recommendations. The recommendations, for the most part, have little detail. It appears that nearly all of the improvements to the preserve require further expert study before any action can be taken. It would be nice if a few improvements had enough detail to proceed without needing such studies. Given the cost and direction of this plan this seems like a reasonable hope.

The plan’s focus is not on human values and seems not to give significant consideration the immediate proximity to the City limits and how the community can enjoy and feel proud of this special place. It is more about providing a nice place for animals undisturbed by humans in an area where miles of undisturbed habitat extend in two directions. Many suggestions that would add value, beauty, and interest to humans are not included in the plan.

Many of the recommendations do not seem well thought out.

Following are just a few examples, and represent many more. Blackberries, a major issue, is detailed in a separate response.

Hide the Hwy 12 bridge area
Blocking the view of the Hwy 12 bridge/hwy with planting will also block the view from the way the great majority of the people of our community experience this area. Twenty thousand plus people a day drive across that bridge at the main entrance to our town. They get a short look at these waterways. In traffic many have several minutes to view this most attractive area of our community. To make it so that a few people will not be able to look at cars, a thousand times as many will not be able to see the waterway, oaks trees, and park.

Shining white in the winter sun.
On the other hand, the suggestion submitted to plant trees with year around leaves to block views of the Sebastopol Inn and the white motor homes in storage overlooking the RR Forest in the winter was omitted. These white surfaces shine bright in the winter sun diminish the attractiveness of the area along the busy RR Forest Trail.
Mow a path to the JR Trail
A Plan recommendation is to mow a path from Tomodatchi Park south to the Joe Rodota Trail. This statement is the extent of the detail, plus a very small map with a dotted line -- not much for the biggest addition to the preserve. The line on the map shows the mowed path going straight through the middle of a field. Not addressed is that one third of the trail would be in unmowable woods or the terrain problems there.

This trail could be one of the more scenic walks in the Preserve, particularly if it touched the edge of the Laguna Channel or bridged Calder Creek, which it could. Left out of this suggestion and importantly, suggestions for the whole plan, are words like, scenic, beautiful, magic spots, (and there are some.)

This town provided a bench and little view area at an opening to their creek. This spot is near a bike trail; about the same distance Calder Creek is from the JR Trail.
A beautiful environment for Sebastopol, south of the Hwy 12 bridge. It is said that all great towns rest on a significant body of water. Sebastopol is no exception. We are fortunate to have the Laguna channel through the most beautiful part of the Laguna that is right at the town’s doorstep. It is unfortunate that we have not taken care of it. The setting and waterway has such great potential. Let’s hope this process is a beginning of making this area into a beautiful natural environment – even a community showpiece.

This is an area that is a gateway to our town in one direction, and a gateway to the Laguna in the other – a prominent location that can affect how the feel about our town and how we value the Laguna. It is a ten minute walk from the town core that can take you into a completely different natural environment. Our community relishes and needs such places to walk, ride bikes, explore, kayak, play in a creek, and we have this place that can be all that so close. It is a most worthwhile project making this place a community treasure.

Above is the cover statement for 16 suggestions for the restoration plan. Only one was partially included, blackberries. This plan uses a cautious traditional approach to “restoration”, native plants and animal habitat. This plan needs vision and creativity to make this a beautiful place that includes the perple in the neighborhood as well, to make the preserve the “community treasure” it could be.
Response to the Laguna Restoration Plan on Blackberry Removal

The blackberries are the biggest degrading factor of the preserve area, and potentially the biggest challenge to deal with. The recommendations do not recognize this. The recommendations are unrealistic, conflicting, and lack detail. It is hard to imagine that the blackberry recommendations came from one who has actually employed them or knows this terrain.

The recommendation: “Managed goat grazing or mowing for above ground growth... and remove roots, by hand or machinery”

It will take an incredible amount of labor to remove all the underground runners and root balls. Roots do not pull up. The stems come from root balls, root balls that are well anchored by a network of roots that connect to other root balls well down in the soil. Whether it is by hand or mechanical digging, getting them all will not happen, even in the accessible soils in open areas. This means the problem with blackberries will be back. The digging out roots process takes repeated digging for two to three year to get them all.

Some of the blackberries are conveniently located on accessible flat ground, but most are not. The proposal does not address this majority of difficult to access blackberries. Below are a few pictures representative of these areas where man nor machine cannot dig. Examples; blackberries entangled in layers of collapsed willow, enmeshed in the roots and branches of dense willow thickest, growing across a steep bank of large concrete chunks, growing out of the rock ballast and in between the railroad ties of a long section of track, growing in gullies and on steep banks; this is where the majority of the blackberries live. This significant problem issue is not mentioned.

While digging up roots by hand is clear enough, what is suggested by mechanical means is not clear at all. This kind of suggestion should completely clear.

Recommendations conflict with other strongly emphasized goals. Examples: “avoid soil disturbance” which is often repeated, “Avoid root damage to desireable plants,” “use care not to damage/destroy desireable plants hidden in invasives.” (How do you explain this to the goats suggested?)
The recommendations do not emphasize as important that all blackberries must go, but rather only remove what is “feasible.” What does feasible mean? Blackberries are one of the most prolific and aggressive invasive species in this environment. What will happen, after the Council’s current determination to restore this area, after the volunteers are tired and the funds have run out? The berries left will keep reproducing. It has happened here before.

The report does not address the ten foot wall of blackberries on the east side of the Joe Rodota Trail. These are on County property, but they will become the City’s problem if ignored. Animals that spread the seeds do not know property boundaries, and this huge hedge produces a gazillion seeds looking for newly dug and mulched soil. The County will allow the removal of these berries.

One of the few specific suggestions was to divide the Rail Road Forest into four geometric areas and remove the blackberries from one area per year, then to apply what is learned from working each area. Using this process, on top of the recommendation to remove the roots extends the completion time out to about six years. This approach will take too long. Many people have tackled black berry removal of this scope and terrain. The consultant should provide a tested answer rather than the suggestion of learn as you go.

The report did not recommend the use of an herbicide based on City policy. The City allows using herbicides on City property when there are no reasonable alternatives. Using selected herbicides is a practical way to go, and is warranted in this situation. The City Council approved the use of Garlon 4 for blackberries in the Rail Road Forest two years ago. (The work was not completed.) This is a category D, low toxicity spray listed for blackberries and use in wetlands. The product was recommended by Brent Reed, Restoration Projects Supervisor for the Laguna Foundation. This herbicide use here was supported by Adam McKannay, Environmental Scientist for the Dept of Fish and Wildlife, and other area professionals. It is not difficult to apply this herbicide individually on berry regrowth sprouts.

The consultants suggests cut invasive plant material should be hauled off and disposed of to prevent regrowth. This is a difficult and costly procedure, and not needed. Cut berry canes can restart new growth only when planted in ideal conditions shortly after they are cut. In the Rail Road Forest masses of berry vines were chopped into short pieces, creating a mulch and adding needed organic content to the soil. Inspections found no pieces regrowing.
Consultants suggest the optimal time for blackberry removal is August through October. It is not. It is in February through mid March. Late summer blackberries are dense, and one cannot see into them, plus the layers of dead vines are dried hard and difficult to cut or pull out of branches. The vines are entangle in all manner of obstacles and dead branches, and hide logs, ditches, camp stoves, barb wire, and what is stressed as important to protect, desireable plants. It is important to see what is buried in those vines. In the recommended working times you cannot. But by the end of January nearly all the berry leaves have dropped and the vines have withers and softened.

Blackberries are a serious problem in these areas. The draft recommendations offer unrealistic, conflicting and vague suggestions to accomplish this most important eradication goal. We need real, usable, clear, tested directions.

Lynn

Following below are four pictures of area where it is not realistic to consider digging out blackberry roots. The majority of the black are growing in these difficult to access locations.
Blackberries growing among layers of broken down willows. (Winter, berries are just starting to grow out.)
A dense thicket of willow far to tight for man or machine to dig in. (winter, berries are just starting to grow out.)
Blackberries growing into the rail road track and rock ballast. (Hand cut path to see the tracks.)
Blackberries growing among huge concrete chunks of a ten foot embankment.
Re: Laguna Wetlands Preserve Restoration and Management Plan (draft)

Dear Creek Stewards,

This restoration plan does not suggest restoration of the waterways, the most significant features in the area. And most significant among them is Calder Creek. The first couple hundred yards of Calder Creek beyond the storm drain exit in the Rail road forest have been highly altered and straightened into a channel with squared sides of highly compacted soil. There are no plans to restore this creek to a more natural state. (see pictures below.)

In your presentation to Council several years ago when endeavoring to restore the portion of Calder Creek in Ives Park, you painted a lovely picture of a creek with sloped banks planted out with ferns and creeky trees over head, and a place for kids to explore and wade in the sand and experience the joy of a creek.

This creek area of Calder is anything but that picture. It could be and should be. This is a highly visible area, or could be, right next to the city limits and to the side of Joe Rodota Trail. It is at a kind of entrance to our town, where many of our community and visitors walk or bike by. It should be beautiful. This restoration document is the place to make that a goal.

Oversight agencies encourage naturalizing channelized waterways. The Army Core of Engineers, the lead agency, requires a no fee permit that can be filled out by a nonprofessional. Funding grants are available that require no match from the City.

Also, left out of the restoration plan are other waterway restorations and improvements. Blackberry removal, there is no mention of the specific need to remove all these plants from the banks of the creeks and Laguna Channel where these plants block a huge portion of the visual and physical access to the waterways. Banks of the Laguna Channel. In Tomodachi Park the banks of the channel are up to four feet higher than summer water levels, with a steep drop off into the water, thanks to fill. This makes getting near the water, a significant feature of the Park, hard to get near. Bank areas should be gently, naturally sloped. An accommodation for kayaks. Our community has hundreds of people who enjoy kayaking. We have a potentially idealic place to enjoy this passive
recreational use at our door step. But we have no accommodation to connect this resource and this need. The plan’s authors have judged that a convenient launch spot should not be accommodated. Clogged with branches The Channel along Tomodachi Park is strewn with down trees, some going clear across the channel. It has been suggested that this should all remain as these down trees provide habitat. This is an extreme view. This area has many times the congestion of down material compared to natural waters in similar settings. The quantity of down material should be reduced to a natural and appropriate level to provide both habitat and room for kayakers to explore up the Channel. The extreme clutter of branches makes this area of the channel, at the park look ugly and degraded.

I hope you will encourage making this potential gem of an area at the edge of our town core the beautiful and natural treasure it could be for the community to enjoy and be proud of.

Lynn

This view of Calder Creek is from the RR Forest Trail Bridge. Squared banks of highly compacted soil drop into a channelized creek.
Response to the Laguna Restoration Plan on suggestions not included

Little in the restoration plan makes the areas more accessible or desirable to the near by human community. Recommendations appear based the premise that restoration means keeping human activity out of areas. In explaining this the restoration plan author(s) express a no compromise approach -- a belief that this is the only way it can be done.

This is of particular concern in the Rail Road Forest area. While most all of Laguna is a vast area well away from human activity, the RR Forest area is different. It’s acres are nestled against the Sebastopol City limit and the town core. The land next to the down town core has different values and needs compared to more remote areas. All needs should be addressed – plant, animal and human.

Example suggestions left out of the Plan to reduce human intrusion

No Exposing RR Track
Exposing/clearing the last remaining several hundred yards of hidden railroad track that exists in our historic railroad town. This is a real piece of history that brings to life an important part of Sebastopol’s past. Let people see it. Allow then to walk along these tracks.

No Providing A Kayaking Launch
At our towns edge in both directions from new Tomodatchi Park are beautiful kayaking waters. If a Sebastopol resident wanted to kayak these waters the Plan’s creator(s) suggest it would be environmentally better to drive out of town four miles, park on Occidental Road and carrying one’s kayak several hundred yards to the water there. This has problems beyond the miles of extra driving. This rough path works for fit people only and the water is choked solid with weeds.

No Calder Creek Trail
A trail along this sweet little year around creek could start next to the City’s down town core, providing a quiet respite, a place to connect with nature a few minutes walk from the center of town. Include a bench to sit on to talk, to have a lunch and to contemplate the stream. This area is among the prettiest in the Laguna.

“People intruding disturb the wild life.” How true is this? The world is full of parks and neighborhoods where people and native animals coexist comfortably. Deer, fox, raccoons abound in rural neighborhoods around Sebastopol. Spring
Lake Park rents dozens of kayaks daily and the waters there team with wildlife. Surprisingly, you see rabbits and quail families next to the Petaluma Airport runway landing area unbothered by the planes. A deer family lives near St Stevens Church along Robinson Road who pay little attention to passing cars. This is in the middle of Sebastopol. Community needs and animals can easily share this area of the Laguna:

*Spring Lake shores team with wildlife that seems indifferent to the many kayaks*

For critters who might be “disturbed” by a few more humans entering the area, there are miles of excellent undisturbed environment both up stream and down stream along the Laguna channel.

The Open Space Easement restrictions were also cited as a justification for this restrictive position on the Plan. But that Easement specifically allows development of “passive recreational uses.” It feels like the restoration plan is being guided by a few in the community that have positions or degrees that allow them to impose their philosophy of what is important. Here, they have unnecessarily omitted compatible and appropriate human needs of the community.

Lynn

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Following are four if the sixteen suggestions submitted to Prunuske Chatham for this area (The other twelve available upon request.)
2. Expose the RR track

Hidden beneath blackberries in the RR Forest is the last remaining stretch of above ground RR track from the many miles that once ran through and around Sebastopol. Expose this two hundred yards of track so that one can walk the length. Replace the forty foot section that was unnecessarily removed when the trail was built so that passing trail users will touch and see this piece of our town’s history. Here is a place to feature Sebastopol’s significant RR History that was all but erased 30 years ago.

This is where a track section was removed was to make it more convenient to put the RR Forest Trail through.
3. Naturalize Calder Creek

From the Calder Creek outfall to a hundred feet past the bridge (600 feet) the creek has been channelized with highly compacted soil; channelized into a straight line with steep banks. Return this readily visible and accessible portion of the creek to its more natural form. Cut the banks back to a gentle slope that will become covered with the sand that migrates from up stream. Make it a place where you can walk to the edge of the water, and a kid can build a dam.

The same should be done to the Laguna channel in Tomodachi Park in the areas that are most visible and accessible to park users. Here the bank is generally about four feet above water level with a 45 degree angle into the water.

Outfall of Calder Creek into the Railroad Forest
Mid section picture of the creek banks
Laguna channel at the most accessible area of Tomodachi Park. A steep bank into the water. There is no place to walk to the waters edge.
4. Create a foot path

Create a foot path following Calder Creek – an intimate path that goes through the woods and touches the edge of the creek here and there. Start from the end of Barnes Road, meandering along the north side of the creek crossing to the south at the RR Forest Trail bridge, then follow the creek more or less going under the canopy of the large Oregon Ash and oaks. Cross under the Joe Rodota Trail next to the creek at the Calder Creek bridge and continue on to the Laguna Channel (now into county area). Bridge the channel (in the future.) It is not too wide here. And continue on to the meadow’s edge where it can intersect the Brown Farm Trail the County plans to develop. From here one can walk to several other trails.

A path through the woods
5. Accommodate Kayaks in Laguna Channel

Accommodate kayaks in Tomodachi Park. 1) Provide a way for vehicles to get near the water and a gentle sloping sand bank to launch a kayak. 2) Clean up the short rubble filled and over grown water connection in the area under the Hwy 12 bridge so kayaks can go from the Park to the larger body of water of the Laguna Channel on the north side of the Hwy 12 bridge. 3) The waterway, south of the bridge has an excessive number of large willow branches overhanging and laying in the water. Some would need to be cleared to let kayaks go back into the interesting recesses in this direction. This would create nearly a mile long kayakable waterway.

You see a large number of kayaks on top of cars and stored in side yards around Sebastopol. However, the closest accessible waters around are a 45 minute drive way. This relatively inexpensive accommodation would create a pretty place to go for a quiet “stroll” on water at our town’s doorstep. Back in the 1920 era this waterway was larger and used by many for weekend canoe and row boat outings.

Some have managed to find a way into the Laguna channel. We should make it easy for all the community to enjoy this great resource.
Some potentially pretty and interesting kayakable areas of the channel are clogged with fallen willow branches.
Total blockage of channel