

Parks and Recreation Department -- Park Volunteer Program

Background

The Parks and Recreation Department relies on volunteers to assist with a variety of park projects. Although most of the projects are one time and generally focused on landscape improvements, there are some organizations and City residents that volunteer their time for basic maintenance tasks. There are two park locations where the volunteer program is critical to the success of a landscaped area of the park. The first, and most significant, is the A.C. Postel Rose Garden, where 80-85 volunteers work over 1,700 hours annually to maintain 24 rose beds and 1,600 rose plants. In the last two years, the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Master Gardeners developed and maintains a butterfly garden at Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden. In Fiscal Year 2009, the City's parks benefited from over 3,000 volunteer hours.

Over the years, the Department has evaluated the feasibility of developing a comprehensive volunteer program. The Department determined that a dedicated staff person would be needed to develop, implement and maintain such a program. (When the City's IPM Program was approved by the City Council in 2003, IPM advocates pledged to support the Department and IPM program with volunteers. Despite this commitment, an IPM volunteer program was never realized.)

Instead of dedicating staff to develop the program, each year the Department sponsors a number of very successful volunteer workdays in various parks. These workdays are focused on park beautification or habitat restoration, since basic park and landscape maintenance tasks, such as weeding, raking, sweeping, and litter pick-up, are less attractive to volunteers. Work days often involve 3 to 5 staff for planning, preparation and implementation.

There are also some community organizations and volunteers that undertake regular maintenance duties such as litter pick-up. The work of these volunteers provides direct support to park operations. Once the volunteers sign-up to care for a park or beach area, additional staff support is not needed. To sign-up, volunteers meet with Santos Escobar to confirm their tasks and sign the City's release of liability form. The list on page 3 outlines the volunteers and provides example of some recent work days.

Development of a Comprehensive Volunteer Program

As a result of the budget reductions in FY 09 and FY 10, the Department has begun to assess whether a comprehensive volunteer program could offset staff reductions and support park maintenance services. There are a number of considerations in this assessment, including the time required and cost for dedicated staff to develop and manage the program, type of tasks that could be performed safely by volunteers and

without daily oversight, amount of volunteer hours that could be realized for tasks otherwise performed by staff, costs to support the program (outreach, materials), and potential support from other organizations, among others. While the Department has not yet conducted an in-depth assessment, staff is reviewing the type of tasks that would support basic park maintenance and the number of volunteer hours needed to perform these tasks. A review of volunteer programs in other communities would also assist determining the feasibility of a program in Santa Barbara.

Park Maintenance Tasks

Of all the basic park maintenance needs, there are tasks that could easily be performed by volunteers, without staff oversight. These tasks include litter pick-up, sweeping of sidewalks and steps, weeding, raking, cleaning of park benches and picnic tables, garbage cans, and barbeques, minor graffiti removal, and minor pruning. There are a number of tasks carried out by trained staff that would not be appropriate for volunteers. These include tasks that require mechanized equipment (mowing, edging, and turf management), restroom cleaning, playground maintenance, infrastructure repairs (benches, signs, and fencing), maintenance of irrigation systems, pest control, and tree pruning or removal.

Volunteer Hours and Commitment Required

To be determined

Dedicated Staff and Program Costs

To be determined

Potential Schedule for Implementation

To be determined

Ongoing and Established Volunteer Groups

A.C. Postel Memorial Rose Garden – Santa Barbara Rose Society – weekly
Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden – Botanic Garden Master Gardeners – weekly
East Beach at Mission Lagoon – Urban Creeks Council - Litter pick-up - monthly
West Beach – Channelkeeper – Litter pick-up - quarterly

Individual Ongoing Volunteer Efforts

Mesa Lane Steps – Litter pick-up and graffiti removal
Honda Valley Park – Small tree care – 3 times per year
Rattlesnake Canyon – Litter pick-up
Bird Refuge – Litter pick-up
Shoreline Park Steps – Sweeping - weekly
Hidden Valley – Litter Pick-up

Department Sponsored Project Specific/Stand Alone Workdays – Partial Listing

Douglas Family Preserve – 2007, 2008, 2009
Franceschi Park Annual Clean-up – every year
Rose Garden Annual Pruning – every year
Franklin Center Landscape Renovation - 2008
Front Country Trails (Forest Service and County Parks) – 2008/2009
Sunflower Park/Neighborhood Clean-up (Looking Good SB) - 2009
Eastside Neighborhood Park/Neighborhood Clean-up (Looking Good SB) – 2008/2009
Oak Park/Mission Creek Planting (Creeks) - 2008
Stevens Park/San Roque Creek native habitat (Creeks) – 2006 and 2007

Recent Additions/Programs in Development

East Beach at Stearns Wharf – Beach Angels – Litter pick-up - weekly
Leadbetter Beach – Macy’s Partners In Time – Litter pick- up - quarterly
La Mesa Park – Mesa Neighbors – To be determined
Shoreline Park – Mesa Neighbors – To be determined