



**CITY OF SANTA BARBARA**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT**

**AGENDA DATE:** January 24, 2018  
**TO:** Parks and Recreation Commission  
**FROM:** Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department  
**SUBJECT:** Franceschi House Options

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Commission:

- A. Receive a presentation on the various options for Franceschi House; and
- B. Recommend that the City Council direct staff to further explore the feasibility and develop conceptual plans for the development of an interpretive pavilion.

**DISCUSSION:**

Background

In 1931, Alden Freeman gifted Dr. Franceschi's residence, known as Montarioso or Franceschi House, and the surrounding acreage to the City for a public park. Dr. Franceschi is recognized for making many contributions towards Santa Barbara's horticultural heritage and his role in Santa Barbara's development in the early 1900s. Franceschi Park now comprises 15 acres of City parkland on the Riviera, in the foothill area above Santa Barbara. Known for providing some of the most beautiful vistas of Santa Barbara, the park features trails and picnic areas and has an old, non-ADA accessible park restroom and an updated park caretaker residence separate from the now vacant Franceschi House.

Over the years, various people have lived as tenants in the house, including horticultural professionals, City employees, and Parks caretakers. No one has lived in the house since 1993. Currently the interior of house is in an unsafe condition. Access is restricted to staff on an as needed basis only. City funding for maintaining Franceschi Park and the house has always been limited. Although rehabilitation of the house has been included in the City's Capital Improvement Plan for many years, the project has never been a priority for funding.

Various options for restoring Franceschi Park and House have been explored since 1971. Due to failed attempts to secure capital and on-going funding through City resources or public/private partnerships, the City considered demolition in 1971 and 1988. The last

initiative to restore the house and park began in 2001 and ended in 2015. In 2001, the City entered into a grant agreement with the Pearl Chase Society (PCS) whereby the PCS would raise the funds to rehabilitate the house and fund a \$250,000 maintenance endowment. Although the City approved a master plan for the park in 2003, and PCS completed preliminary restoration plans for the house, the project was put on hold in 2010 due to a number of fiscal challenges

In April 2015, the PCS concurred with City staff that the project to rehabilitate the Franceschi House should be abandoned and that the current grant agreement be terminated. The board expressed interest in partnering with the City on an alternative project in the park to honor Dr. Franceschi and Alden Freeman. As outlined in the attached Council Agenda Report, in June 2015, the Parks and Recreation Department (Department) recommended to City Council that the City discontinue efforts to renovate the house and instead develop an alternate project on site to recognize the contributions of Dr. Franceschi and others associated with the park.

#### Franceschi House Options

At the June 2015 meeting, rather than move forward with the staff recommendation, the City Council directed the Department to further evaluate the feasibility and cost of the various options for Franceschi House and improvements to the park infrastructure. Specifically, Council desired more information on the cost to complete site structural and access improvements necessary to support any proposed change to the house, as well as options for revenue generation and costs for site and structure maintenance. The Pearl Chase Society also proposed to evaluate feasibility and funding for the rehabilitation and preservation of the exterior of the house in order to recognize the contributions of Dr. Franceschi.

Since then, the Department completed soils studies and developed preliminary grading, drainage and access plans to better understand the potential site improvement needs and costs, identified necessary revisions to the Franceschi Park Master Plan, and worked with the Pearl Chase Society and other City Departments to evaluate the cost and feasibility of three options. These options include: 1) Full house restoration and master plan implementation; 2) Rehabilitation and preservation of the exterior of the house; and, 3) Construction of an interpretive pavilion that would integrate components of the house and honor Dr. Franceschi's horticultural legacy.

#### *Option 1: House Rehabilitation*

This includes full rehabilitation of the house (interior and exterior) to the Alden Freeman period. In addition to the restoration of the house, use of the house would require changing the occupancy from residential to commercial, installation of an interior lift to meet ADA requirements, foundation replacement, and site improvements to accommodate fire engines, among others. Public use of the house would be very limited since it would not include a library or research space. It would be available for reservation

for groups up to 30. The cost to complete the house rehabilitation and immediate site improvements is estimated to be \$6.5-7.5 million.

*Option 2 – Franceschi House Stabilization*

Option 2, the alternative evaluated by the Pearl Chase Society, consists of stabilizing the house interior to limit further damage, and foundation upgrades or replacement. The exterior and immediate surroundings would be mostly restored to the Alden Freeman period. There would be no access to the house, except for maintenance purposes. The cost to complete exterior renovation and immediate site improvements is estimated to be \$3-3.5 million.

*Option 3 – Interpretive Pavilion*

Option 3 consists of deconstruction of the house, and integration of certain elements, such as the medallions and stained glass windows, into an outdoor interpretive pavilion. Deconstruction of the house would ensure key features could be salvaged and sold to support pavilion construction. Conceptual design options would also include the presentation of existing exterior foundations and other building features. The site would be fully accessible to park visitors during park operating hours. The cost to pursue this option, including immediate site improvements, is estimated to be \$3-4 million.

Franceschi Master Plan and Site Improvements

In 2003, the City Council approved the Franceschi Park Master Plan which addressed improvements to park, use of the house and grounds, as well as implementation and funding strategies. The plan was based on Franceschi House being rehabilitated to support three primary uses, including serving as a public facility for educational and community uses, providing an interpretive center and library, and providing a rental residence for a city-employed docent coordinator or other tenant. Further evaluation of the cost to implement the plan related to site improvements such as a new restroom and accessible pathways, as well as revisions to revenue projections from event rentals and City Charter Section 520 limitations on use of park property, park deed restrictions, and residential revenues, deemed the approved Master Plan infeasible.

With all of the options described above, the Department would complete a variety of site improvements. The proposed improvements are substantially less comprehensive than the improvements included in the approved Franceschi Park Master Plan. The Master Plan includes substantial improvements of all existing trails and the addition of new trails, replacement of the restroom, and substantial new plantings throughout the park, among others. Due to the cost of carrying out and maintaining such improvements, the Department would revise the Master Plan to include geotechnical/structural improvements of existing walls and certain paths around the house, drainage improvements, and new amenities such as benches, signs and a demonstration garden of Franceschi-related plantings. The site improvements are estimated to be \$750,000. The cost is included in the estimates above.

#### Maintenance Costs and Revenue Generation

Currently the City does not invest in any maintenance of Franceschi House. In 2016, the Department replaced the roof to protect the interior while it was further evaluating house options. Current park maintenance costs are about \$60,000 per year. Maintenance activities focus on restroom service, litter pick-up, weeding, irrigation, and tree maintenance. Annual tree work is also completed in compliance with the City's Wildland Fire Plan. It is estimated that under the various options, from house restoration to interpretive pavilion, the Department would incur some increased level of park maintenance costs. In addition, facility maintenance costs for the house restoration option would be about \$65,000 per year. Only the house renovation option has the potential to generate limited revenue from facility rentals due to its small size and location.

#### Interpretive Pavilion Recommendation

For the last two years, the Department worked closely with the Pearl Chase Society to review options and share information. In addition to attending two PCS meetings, the Department hosted a site visit to the house. On October 19, 2017, the PCS Board voted to support further evaluation of the interpretive pavilion option. The Department also presented its work efforts to the Riviera Association at a general membership meeting in early 2016. The Department will be presenting its recommendations to the Riviera Board on January 22, 2018.

The Department recommends that the City further explore the feasibility of developing an interpretive pavilion as the preferred option for Franceschi House. It is unlikely that the City would secure grant funding to offset the demand for General Fund revenues to support house restoration. Restoration of the house would serve a very limited number of park visitors and would not generate sufficient revenues to support maintenance costs. While stabilization of the house and restoration of the exterior might be less costly, the Department would not recommend use of City funds for this purpose and the Pearl Chase Society does not have the capacity to raise funds for the project. The third option, while posing some challenges for design and environmental review due to the house's status as a Structure of Merit, provides the most feasible approach at this time for both honoring Dr. Franceschi's legacy while enhancing park resources and serving a broader park visitor population.

The Department is scheduled to present the findings of the technical studies, revised cost estimates for the three house options, and the recommendation to develop an interpretive pavilion to the City Council on February 13, 2018.

**ATTACHMENT:** June 23, 2015 Council Agenda Report

**PREPARED BY:** Jill E. Zachary, Parks and Recreation Director