

PVPLC, city agreement signed

By Mary Scott
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RPV — Rancho Palos Verdes City Council approved an updated 50-year management agreement between the city and the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy on Tuesday night.

The conservancy, the city's habitat manager for the 1,400-acre Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, has shared in the acquisition and management of the growing preserve for some time.

The nature preserve began with the purchase of the Forrestal parcel in 1996, and continued with the purchases of the Barry Hon property in 2005 and the Upper Filiorum open space from York Long Point Associates in 2009. Money to purchase the properties came from state and federal grants, city contributions and private donations made to the conservancy.

The city entered into a joint management agreement with the conservancy in June 2001. Those duties were expanded in 2005, in accordance with the city's newly adopted Natural Communities Conservation Plan. With the completion of the preserve and the pending approval of the NCCP by wildlife agencies, both the city and the conservancy felt it was time to establish a formal, more detailed management agreement.

The new agreement solidifies the ongoing management responsibilities of the PV Nature Preserve for each party, as well as each party's financial obligation.

Based on 2010-11 numbers, it cost the PVPLC approximately \$336,000 to perform their management responsibilities in the preserve. The city provided approximately \$126,000 of that cost. The city will maintain its \$100,000 annual contribution, adjusted for inflation based on the consumer price index, and pay the conservancy \$15,000

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— resident Betty Field Strauss

per year for trail and habitat maintenance at Oceanfront Estates.

The conservancy will continue to provide at least \$50,000 in cash and in-kind services, and approximately \$50,000 in volunteer hours annually.

Mayor Pro Tem Anthony Missetich questioned how the city's cost was formulated: based on what was needed or what the city could pay.

Joel Rojas, director of community development, said it was determined on what was needed and what was paid the previous year.

Should the conservancy default on its financial obligations, staff said, the city would be responsible for the full amount of maintenance in the preserve.

"We could pick up the whole bill if the conservancy couldn't pay," Missetich clarified.

Many conservancy board members, staff and supporters were on hand at Tuesday night's meeting assuring council members that there is no better steward of the preserve than the PVPLC; one saying the city would pay a greater amount of money to an outside organization for the work done by the conservancy and its supporters.

Conservancy founder Bill Ailor said the nonprofit's intention is not to burden the city with maintenance costs.

The conservancy, he said, has generous donors and a number of dedicated volunteers.

Others said the city's open space is a legacy to future generations and it is what the citizen founders worked for during the incorporation of the city in the early 1970s.

"I'm sure the founders would be proud of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy," resident Betty Field Strauss said.

Under the new agreement, the conservancy's responsibilities include: habitat restoration (5 acres every year), habitat enhancement (invasive plant removal) and habitat monitoring (annual reports); maintenance of unimproved trails and trail signage on an as-needed basis; fuel modification for fire prevention purposes on PVPLC-owned lands in the preserve; maintenance of any improvements installed by the PVPLC in the preserve.

The conservancy must prepare and submit a draft Habitat Restoration Plan for the city's development director, who will then forward to the Parks Department, city manager's office and the city's geologist for review.

The city will provide: waste management on an as-needed basis; public safety (ranger patrols) and city signage maintenance; maintenance of any roads (Burma Road) and trails that are improved with a particular surface (asphalt, cement or decomposed granite) or required tread width; and fuel modification for fire prevention purposes on city-owned lands.

Councilman Stefan Wolowicz voiced some concerns about allowing the conservancy to mediate issues with wildlife agencies on behalf of the city rather than city staff.

Staff felt that the conservancy's expertise in preserve management would better serve the city in dealing with wildlife agencies.

"[The agreement] makes it clear that the city has the final say," Rojas said.

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