

From: [Amos White](#)
To: [Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft](#); [John Knox White](#); [Tony Daysog](#); [Trish Spencer](#); [Malia Vella](#)
Cc: [Eric Levitt](#); [Lara Weisiger](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: : Item 9G - City Council Meeting March 16, 2021- Potential Changes to the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park Design Development Plan
Date: Tuesday, March 30, 2021 3:10:14 PM

Dear Mayor Ashcraft and Council Members:

It comes as a concern that there would be an agenda item to make changes to Consider Addressing the Process for Potential Changes to the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park Design Development Plan at the council meeting before there was a public review and input at a publicly accessible commission meeting.

As the park and open space is a public commons, and the Plan was already voted on with broad public support in approval, wouldn't it be appropriate for a public hearing for any changes to be brought before either the Recs and Parks Commission or Planning Commission to allow for due public review and input.

To my awareness, there have been no open public meetings to present any proposed change as proposed here in this item to the nearly completed Jean Sweeney Open Space Park (JSOSP) Plan. If there were, how were they publicly noticed and where?

Moreso, the public has not been informed as to why it is suddenly necessary for the city have Council make a decision to not continue with the Union Pacific Railroad property purchase as planned and scheduled since 2016. As for more than 7 years now, the public has believed that the promise the city made to the community in developing the park would be upheld.

Now, the proposed redesign has had no public announcement nor hearing for its necessity. How does this not bypass the public process and authority of the Recreation and Parks Commissioners and the public's access to make recommendations on this public commons in advance of its proposal to Council?

I would ask the council to send consideration of staff's proposed changes to an appropriate commission for deliberation and input.

I do not agree with the proposed changes, as they would negatively impact the amount of open space and park land as presented to the public and voted on by Council. Specifically, the loss of the Southern Pacific Railroad land along the southern edge of the park and the loss of the area west of 8th Street compromises the integrity of the park as proposed and committed to the community. It would also impact the following:

- a. The Food Bank plans to build at the park now, due to uncertainty of the land purchase.
- b. The community gardens planned next to the Food Bank to make it easier for surplus food to be donated to them are now in jeopardy.
- c. The loss of parking spaces in the West end is breaking a promise to the neighborhoods who worry that park visitors will be parking on the street that will have walk-in access to the park. This has also been a concern for the adjacent business park on the North side of the park.

d. The Union Pacific Railroad land beyond the fence as the area now in jeopardy of being lost will now allow UPR to dispose of the land as they wish. This now would potentially change the character and nature of the "park and open space" the public was led to believe this space was planned to be.

f. Moreover, the Union Pacific Railroad strip of land of nearly 4.52 acres, put over 100 mature trees there at risk to be removed when the land is sold for other purposes.

As a CASA member who participated on the city's Climate Emergency Declaration Resolution and as an environmental nonprofit executive of an urban reforestation organization, retaining mature trees in a park area should be a high priority for the City to help achieve its climate action plan goals of carbon sequestration.

I would ask that City Council reconsider staff's proposal and remand any proposed changes to the JSOSP Plan to appropriate public Commission first as an act of transparency and matter of public process before a council decision. This would enable and assure that the public can, first, be duly informed, and; second, be given the ability to review and comment.

Thank you for your consideration in my request.

Respectfully,

AMOS WHITE
Alameda Resident
Founder/CPO - 100K Trees for Humanity

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*Amos White | Founder & Chief Planter
100K Trees for Humanity
An urban reforestation initiative.
www.100ktrees4humanity.com
415.489.0074 c*

From: [Dorothy Freeman](#)

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Regarding: Item 9G City Council Meeting March 16, 2021- Potential Changes to the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park Design Development Plan

Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2021 11:32:01 AM

Regarding: Item 9G City Council Meeting March 16, 2021- Potential Changes to the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park Design Development Plan

Dear Mayor Ashcraft and Alameda City Council Members;

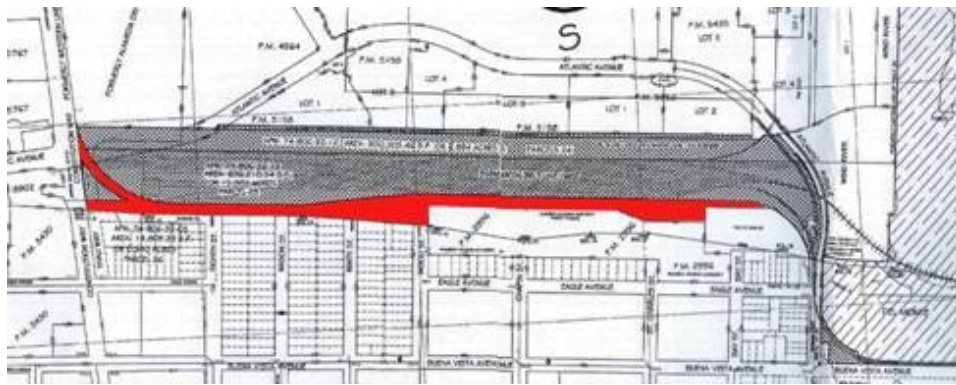
The recent decision by the Alameda City Council, in Closed Door sessions and without public comment, to not purchase the 2.45 acres of Union Pacific Railroad remnants is not in the public interest. The public has taken an active part in design of the park and had a right to understand why the design plans would be changed prior to the park redesign being public noticed.

Since 2013 when the planning phase began for the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park, the Union Pacific Railroad land on the South side has been presented as being incorporated into the park.

On March 1, 2016, the City Council approved a contract with Placeworks Landscape Architects to provide the design services for Jean Sweeney Open Space Park which included the 4.52 acres of Union Pacific Railroad land as part of their design work. The map at the entrance to the East end playground area shows that the Union Pacific Railroad land was included in the park plan on opening day December 19, 2018.



The Union Pacific Railroad parcels included in the designed park are show in the red on the following map.



Public discussion about not purchasing the full 4.52 acres of Union Pacific Railroad land started at the September 4, 2018 City Council meeting. At that council meeting the land purchase plan was changed to include only 2.8 acres of remnant parcels of the Union Pacific Railroad land indicated in blue and designated "Acquire" in the following image.



Excerpts of the City Council agenda staff report's executive summary, shown below, indicate the City of Alameda would acquire the 2.8 acres (4 remnant parcels) by eminent domain.

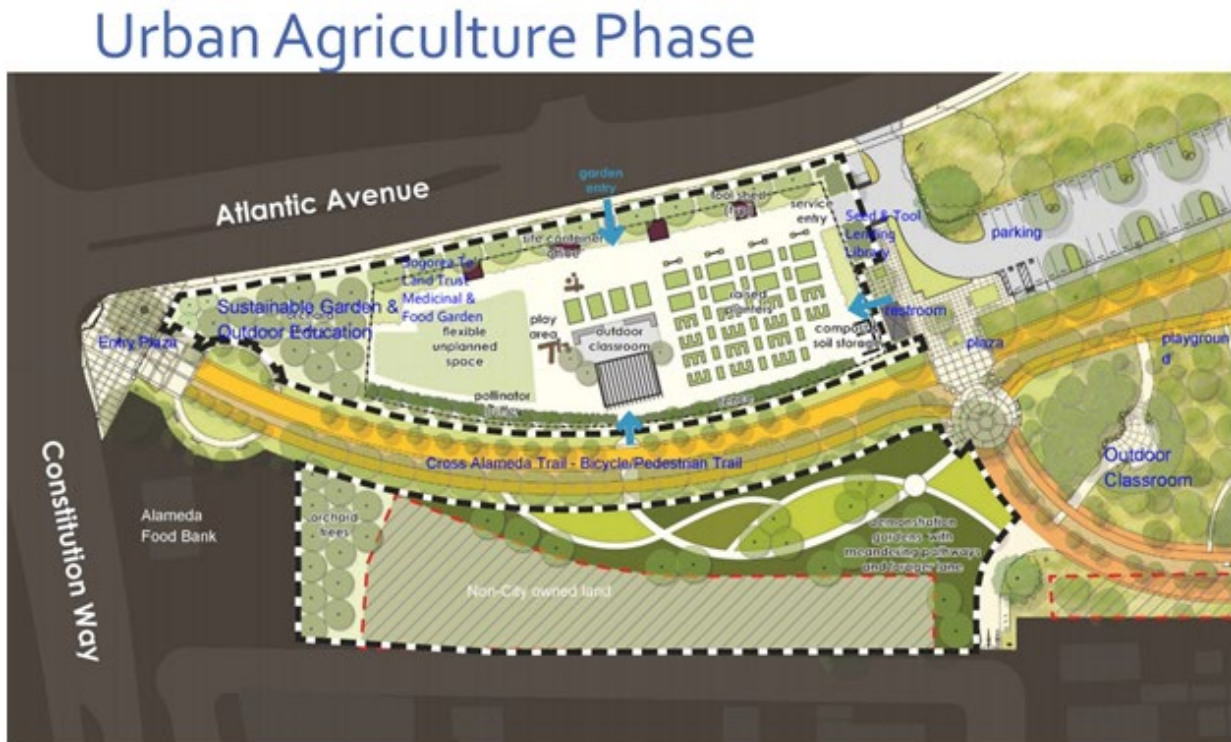
The City of Alameda also needs to acquire four remnant parcels totaling approximately 2.8 acres of the 4.52 acres owned by Union Pacific to complete major public access components of the Sweeney Park Project. Without the remnant parcels, a significant portion of the existing residential neighborhood to the south of the Jean Sweeney Park Project will be cut off from any direct public access to the park and the gateway to the Cross Alameda Trail at Constitution Way will not be completed to national "best practice" standards for pedestrian and bicycle access and safety.As a result, City staff is recommending that the City Council acquire from Union Pacific the 2.8 acres of needed property for the Sweeney Park Project via eminent domain.

At the October 16, 2018 City Council meeting, item 5G Consent Calendar, the Council voted to file for imminent domain and place \$1,098,000 with the Condemnation Deposits Fund and request Immediate possession of the four remnant parcels. The Council also voted to *Seek an Order for Prejudgment Possession* of the four parcels. After depositing the funds the City was

allowed immediate possession. A court date was set to determine the final cost the city would have to pay for the 2.8 acres, but was later postponed.

On February 25, 2021, Alameda Recreation & Parks Department Director Wooldridge held a zoom meeting to present a new layout for the West end of the park, known as the Urban Agriculture Western Phase, to the public for public input.

The following image is what was presented to the public at the zoom meeting. The participants were not told the need for the new design was because the City was not purchasing the Union Pacific Railroad property outlined in red and noted as "Non-City Owned Property"



On March 11, 2021 the following revised design was presented to the ARPD Commission. Director Wooldridge stated there were approximately 1000 responses to the online survey. The results of the survey have not been made public.



At the public zoom meeting and at the ARPD Commission meeting the "non-city owned land" was never referred to as the Southern Pacific Railroad owned land nor was it explained why the City was no longer purchasing most of the 4 remnant parcels.

It's great that ARPD has started working to secure the funding for Phase 2 of the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park development. The community gardens and the related growing amenities planned are a long awaited addition to what has become one of Alameda's favorite parks.

It is also great that the streets from the southern neighborhoods and the business park on the North side can be opened up and the Western remnants that cross behind the existing Alameda Food Bank can be added to the park.

What is not great is the loss of the other Southern Pacific Railroad land not being added to the park. Loss of the large space West of 8th Street is detrimental to the original community promise.

- a. The Food Bank has been hampered in their plans to build at the park due to uncertainty of the land purchase.
- b. The community gardens were planned to sit next to the Food Bank to make it easier for surplus food to be donated to them.
- c. The loss of parking spaces in the West end is breaking a promise to the neighborhoods who worry that park visitors will be parking on the street that will have walk-in access to the park. This has also been a concern for the adjacent business park on the North side of the park.
- d. In the past 2 years the Union Pacific Railroad land beyond the fence has not been maintained and has become an eyesore. Will the Union Pacific Railroad land continue in this condition?
- e. The Union Pacific Railroad will be unhampered in their decision to dispose of the land they will retain.
- f. With Union Pacific Railroad pertaining possession of the nearly 4.52 acres, the wonderful

mature trees along the South side are likely to be removed when the land is sold for other purposes. Retaining mature trees in a park area should be a high priority for the City.

A major problem is the public has not been told why it is necessary to decide not to continue with the Union Pacific Railroad property purchase when for over 7 years it has been in the promise made to the community. There has been no public announcement as to why the redesign is necessary. The public participants have not been given the ability to comment on why the city is no longer interested in purchasing the Union Pacific Railroad land.

All decisions regarding the purchase of any of the Union Pacific Railroad land has been discussed behind the doors of closed session. While real estate discussions belong in closed session, Council decisions must become part of the public discussion. Public discussion should have been agendized before the Urban Agriculture Western Phase redesign was published and comments invited. There should still be a public discussion regarding the decision to not purchase more of the Union Pacific Railroad land on the South side of the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park.

Respectfully,
Dorothy Freeman

cc: City Manager Levitt
City Clerk Weisiger