

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council**March 3, 2020**

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**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION, PROPOSED ACQUISITION OF BROADCAST HILL, AND PROPOSED CONTRACT WITH TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND**

The purpose of this report is to update the City Council on the City's Open Space Preservation Program and requested City Council approval of: 1) an M&C on March 3 to authorize acquisition of 50 acres known as Broadcast Hill, and 2) an M&C on March 17 to authorize a contract with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to develop the open space preservation program and priorities.

Background

On December 3, 2019, the City Council received a briefing on the importance of preserving natural open spaces to help achieve the City Council's strategic goals and implement the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans. Fort Worth continues to grow rapidly, and approximately 53 acres of undeveloped land is subdivided (platted) for development each week. Conserving undeveloped land in high priority areas creates special places for future generations and provides a wide range of benefits addressing: health, recreation, flood control, water quality, community access, equity, preservation of iconic places, economic development, and ecosystem preservation.

An interdepartmental Open Space Team has been evaluating options for long-range open space planning and prioritization. City departments include Code Compliance - Environmental Quality, Communications, Development Services, Economic Development, Park & Recreation, Planning & Data Analytics, Property Management, Transportation & Public Works - Stormwater Management, and Water. City staff has also been collaborating with the North Central Texas Council of Governments, Streams & Valleys, Inc., and the Tarrant Regional Water District in the initial program formation process.

Broadcast Hill Acquisition

Also in December 2019, the City learned that the 50 acres known as Broadcast Hill was for sale, immediately adjacent to the 160-acre Tandy Hills Natural Area purchased in 1960. The Friends of Tandy Hills Natural Area has garnered broad support for the acquisition of the property and has raised over \$60,000 in private donations to demonstrate the importance of this property to Tandy Hills and Fort Worth. The Open Space Team has evaluated the property and supports the acquisition to benefit health, recreation, stormwater runoff, water quality, and natural habitat.

The March 3 City Council agenda will include an M&C authorizing the purchase for \$610,000, which would be funded by City's Mineral Trust Fund and be offset by the private donations once collected. The deed will contain language preventing surface use of any kind for mineral development. The property would be maintained by the Park and Recreation Department.

Trust for Public Land Contract

The Open Space Team requested a proposal from the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to share their national expertise and innovative technology in order to develop a data-driven Open Space Prioritization Plan. The Plan will incorporate community priorities to identify high-priority areas to consider for open space acquisition and preservation. TPL will develop the Plan to serve as a guide for the City and its conservation partners to strategically protect and preserve the most important open spaces in Fort Worth.

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The scope of the proposed contract with TPL includes:

- Development of a web-based, Geographic Information System Decision Support Tool to assist with the identification and prioritization of open space for preservation
- Five years of annual updates and technical support for the Decision Support Tool
- Transfer of the tool to the City's Information Technology Solutions Department for continued updates and maintenance at the end of 5 years
- Development of prioritization goals, the individual criteria to be modeled within each goal, weighting factors, and a Data Dictionary to document methodology and data sources for the goals and criteria
- Partnership with The Texas Trees Foundation to generate high resolution tree cover and general land cover data for the 350 square miles encompassing the City. This high resolution tree canopy data is integral to decision making and ranking.
- Website for City staff to use to evaluate acquisition areas, maps of the results, and exportable parcel reports for comparison of different opportunities for open space conservation
- Identification of the "top 20" highest priority areas for open space preservation
- Creation of a public-facing interactive "story map" website to share project goals, objectives, methodology, and high-level findings
- Identification of potential funding sources for land preservation
- Evaluation of policy approaches to incentivize open space dedication
- Recommendations regarding Open Space Program management and natural land maintenance
- Final report describing analysis, methodology, results and recommendations

TPL will support the City in community engagement by participating in public meetings, providing maps, and serving as a technical resource. In addition to public meetings, Open Space Team members will collaborate with pertinent boards and commissions and partner organizations, and will explore funding opportunities through foundations, grants, and other sources.

The March 17 City Council agenda will include an M&C authorizing a contract with TPL for \$388,000 from the General Capital Projects Fund. TPL's final report and prioritization tool would be available in about one year. Until the TPL prioritization tool is in place, the Open Space Team will assess undeveloped property listed for sale for open space preservation opportunities.

Questions about the Open Space Preservation Program and opportunities for property acquisition can be directed to Jennifer Dyke, TPW Stormwater Program Manager and Open Space Team Lead, at 817-392-2714.

David Cooke
City Manager