



## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY FORM

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**MEETING DATE:** 1/28/2024

**PREPARED BY:** Jason O'Mara, Assistant Director of Parks & Recreation and David Heinicke, Parks & Recreation Board Member

**AGENDA CONTENT:** Discussion and possible action on Lakeside Park wildscape proposal.

**AGENDA ITEM SECTION:** Regular Agenda

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**BUDGETED AMOUNT:** NA

**FUNDS REQUESTED:** NA

**FUND:** NA

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In 2023, Lakeside Park opened with a belief in balancing recreational opportunities and preserving natural habitats for wildlife. However, due to funding limitations, some design features, including wildflower plantings, butterfly gardens, and buffer plantings, were removed from the final plans.

Recently, the department has been fortunate to receive assistance with maintenance and upkeep projects at Lakeside Park from Parks & Recreation Board member, David Heinicke. While working in the park, David identified opportunities for natural habitat restoration and presented a wildscape proposal to the Parks & Recreation leadership team for consideration. The proposal aims to restore portions of the park, aligning it with its original vision as a space for both recreation and environmental conservation.

The following maps identify seven designated areas within the park to revert to natural habitats, with the potential to expand to additional areas in the future. Restoration efforts would begin by ceasing mowing in these areas, implementing "Level 6 - Natural Area" protocols, and eliminating exotics and invasives either mechanically or with herbicides. Level 6 - Natural Areas are defined as undeveloped areas per the Levels of Vegetative Maintenance Attention for Parks, Facilities, & Rights-of-Ways (see internal Parks & Recreation policy enclosed). Native species such as pecan, oak, elm, hackberry, cherry laurel, hawthorns, viburnum, yaupon, beautyberry, buttonbush, and red buckeye will be planted or seeded to encourage natural growth. Non-native invasive species, including Johnson grass, Chinese tallow, Macartney rose, and privet, will be managed through herbicide treatments or mechanical removal. Informational signage will also be developed to educate the public about the project, its benefits, and the ecological value of the restored areas.

During the transitional phase, the restoration areas may appear unmanaged or overgrown, but this is a natural part of the process. Over time, with targeted enhancements, these areas will transform into high-quality native habitats that support diverse wildlife and promote ecological

balance. Additionally, the restoration effort offers operational benefits, including reduced mowing and maintenance costs, freeing up resources for other park needs.

This initiative not only restores critical wildlife habitats but also fosters community engagement through environmental education and awareness. It reinforces Lakeside Park's role as a vital community resource that values both recreation and conservation, ensuring its sustainability for future generations.

On December 9, the Parks & Recreation Board considered the proposed wildscape plan. The proposed plan was approved by the Parks & Recreation Board with five in favor and zero opposed. Parks & Recreation Board members present included Clara Dannhaus (Chair), Blaine Smith, David Heinicke, Erin Boren, and Jessica Norris; Guadalupe Morales and Luis Leja were absent.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends the City Council approve the Lakeside Park wildscape plan as presented.