

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report

Meeting: September 25, 2025

From: City Manager Department

Subject: Landscape Design and Planting Plan for the Park at Rispin Mansion



Recommended Action: Receive report.

Background: The City of Capitola initiated plans for a park at the Rispin Mansion site in 2014. At the time, significant community outreach and collaboration helped form the project, which included an extensive landscape design and planting plan developed by Michael Arnone and Associates. In its current iteration, the Park at Rispin Mansion Project (Park) is a multi-year effort to create a new public park and event space on the historic Rispin Mansion property, providing community gathering areas, open space, and access to the Soquel Creek corridor. The project includes an amphitheater, walking loop, fountain plaza, sundial installation, and multiple undeveloped landscaped areas, with design elements intended to reflect the site's historic character.

On July 28, 2022, the City Council approved the plans, specifications, and construction budget of the Project. On February 3, 2023, staff published an advertisement inviting construction bids for the Project. A public bid opening was held on February 22, 2023; however, no construction bids were received. In response, staff reached out to potential bidders, who indicated they did not bid because the City's budget was insufficient for the scope of work. In compliance with provisions outlined in the public contract code, staff worked with a local contractor, Betz Works, to develop a feasible scope of work within the approved budget.

On March 28, 2024, Council approved a professional services agreement with Betz Works to complete the amended scope of work in the amount of \$949,000. Park construction began in spring 2024. The extensive planting plan was removed from the full project, with the intention that further landscape improvements could be funded and completed later. The current project includes City-installed landscaping, adjacent to the grand staircase and to the wall fronting Wharf Road. Un-landscaped areas will be finished with topsoil and stubbed-out water service to support future planting and irrigation.

During the August 28, 2025, City Council meeting, staff provided an update on the Park at Rispin Mansion project and asked for Council direction regarding a landscaping approach. Council directed staff to seek a volunteer community partner for the installation and maintenance of landscaping at the Park. The selected partner could offer labor and financial support for improved landscaping at the new park.

Discussion: Prior to seeking a partner organization to carry out the garden's installation and maintenance, staff intends to present City Council with a landscape design for the Park, to help ensure the landscaping meets community and Council expectations.

The landscape design must be attainable for current Public Works staff to maintain to facilitate consistency and longevity at the Park. This ensures that, if the City's partner no longer wishes to maintain the City's landscaping, City staff can take on the work and preserve the Park's integrity. To that end, staff intends to retain Michael Arnone and Associates to modify the original landscape design and prepare a new Park at Rispin Mansion planting plan (new plan). This way, the new plan will honor and include the community input that was incorporated in the 2015 plan-set, while being realistic for future maintenance.

Staff intends to execute a professional services agreement with Michael Arnone and Associates in an amount between five and ten thousand dollars. The agreement will include modification of the original landscape design and planting plan, a community meeting to discuss the new plan, and presentation of the new plan to Council for approval. Once approved by Council, the new plan will be included in the selection process for a volunteer community partnership.

Staff intends to return to City Council with a draft request for proposals (RFP) and the proposed new landscape plan for approval in early 2026. Once approved by the Council, staff will publish the RFP seeking a community partner(s) for planting and maintenance. The RFP will include language clarifying that responsible community organizations may apply to complete portions of the requested work; allowing the City to partner with multiple organizations, if needed.

Upon approval of the RFP, staff recommends Council appoint an ad-hoc committee (made up of two Council Members) to work with staff to review proposals and recommend which community partner to select. Staff would prepare a Memorandum of Understanding for Council approval once a partner is identified through the RFP selection process.

On August 28, 2025, Council also discussed interest in a paver fundraising project for certain areas of hardscaping in the Park. Staff has done preliminary research and will return to Council with a proposal for the paver stone fundraising project this Winter.

Earlier this summer, staff submitted a grant request to fund a public art project at the reflecting pool at the Park at Rispin Mansion. Staff anticipates receiving the results of that grant application this December. In addition, next month, the Capitola Art and Cultural Commission will discuss developing an art project at the reflecting pool. That reflecting pool is temporarily filled to protect the public from a fall hazard.

Fiscal Impact: Staff intends to execute a professional services agreement with Michael Arnone and Associates in an amount between \$5,000 and \$10,000, which will include a new landscape design and planting plan and an in-person community meeting to solicit public input. Staff is proposing to use existing funding within the City-wide parks budget, and will monitor expenses throughout the year and propose a budget amendment at the mid-year review, if necessary.

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