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E-Rock PLP&T vision concept in response to Board of Trustees' request October 2024

November 14, 2024 BOT minutes: "clarified the scope of the vision that the Board wanted from the Parks Commission and it was agreed to focus on the space that the cabins will leave vacant while providing an overall concept if Parks has any ideas."

The Town of Palmer Lake Parks and Trails (and Open Space) Plan is an integrated, visionary plan to guide the development of Palmer Lake's parks, recreation, open space, and trails facilities, programs and services for up to ten years. As a companion document to the Palmer Lake Comprehensive Plan (dated, 2022), the Plan responds to and builds on other long-range planning documents and recommends the Town, Public Works, and Parks and Trails Commission develop management plans for key open space areas such as E-Rock (to include possibly a new name).

The Town is moving forward with a mission to protect and enhance the natural, cultural, and scenic resources unique to the open spaces of its planning area. The Open Space Management Plan (OSMP), once fully developed, is designed to guide the management of undeveloped areas, like E-Rock, that are recommended to be permanently maintained in a natural state, with added recreation amenities considered in the future, e.g. athletic field, nature center, etc..

In general this scope is a long-range plan developed by Palmer Lake Parks and Trails (PLP&T) for the immediate and future use of the portion of E-Rock property along Monument Creek identified on the attached map as Zones 0, 1, and 3, the .9 mile trail that was established in June 2024 that now runs inside the perimeter of the entire property, and along Monument Creek to the west of USAFA bridge #1. The area includes the open air pavilion that is being renovated by the PLP&T Commission, areas where the cabins were, and one remaining chapel building whose fate has not been addressed by the BOT, yet most feel that it should be put to some use, and the small chicken coop just inside the property next to the USAFA bridge #1 (which PLP&T would like to turn into a temporary weather shelter for trail users).

PLP&T will "provide an overall concept (vision)" of the rest of the property: ball-field, perimeter trail corridor, open field areas north of the lodge and dorm buildings - Zones 1 & 4, "beaver pond" area SE of ball field - Zone 0, and recently mitigated slope just south and adjacent to the above two buildings - Zone 2. This vision/concept excludes the future Public Safety area along State Hwy 105 (2-3 acres), Willan's leased 2.8 acres, the large lodge / dorm buildings, and former "caretaker house" next to the large buildings.

Should the area of the lodge / dorm buildings be included and torn down, the area would be designated a combination of zones 1, 2, and 3 with 2 open air pavilions, 3-4 benches, (passive recreation), native grasses and pollinators, possibly appropriate trees (protected area), and wildflower garden (nature escape).

As the PLP&T Commission is made up of volunteers, relying on help from Palmer Lake Public Works department, we suggest going slowly with quality and timely additions to the property, i.e. additional trails, athletic field, designated wildlife and open space areas, and nature center all driven by public input, and available funds to maintain a mostly passive park and open space environment **with no large scale events and no new building construction recommended by the Elephant Rock Advisory Committee (2024)**. The exception might be the placement of one or two open pavilions where the lodge / dorm building were if removed. Palmer Lake is fortunate to have Centennial Park which has successfully hosted numerous large scale events, thus a second venue of this sort in E-Rock would be contraindicated.

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PLP&T also suggests / requests that, if the BOT agrees with the long-range vision, that the zones for the roughly 20-22 acres (depending on the lodge / dorm buildings inclusion), as described be designated as a park/open space all at one time, not piecemeal. This would facilitate long range planning and budgeting, maximizing PLP&T volunteer efforts. Opening of the area from State Hwy 105 still depends on work with CDOT, which gives PLP&T time to complete some of the suggested plans.

The attached map outlines the suggested use and maintenance zones for the entire property - Zones 0-4

Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission also would like to see the above areas, Zones 0-4, be designated as a park so that future improvement and maintenance activities could be funded in part by the Conservation Trust Fund moneys the Town receives annually from lottery funds for parks improvement.

### **Purpose and Intent**

Open space is defined as: protected lands of significant value that are conserved in their natural state, restored, or improved with appropriate native landscaping to retain a natural or natural-appearing condition.

This OSMP is different from the Comprehensive Plan and its companion Glen Park or Centennial Park Master Plans because it does not provide land use policies or development design guidelines; it is a roadmap of sustainable practices for maintaining and managing lands the Town has acquired for an open space park. These open space parcels and passive park differ from traditional park developments because infrastructure is focused to provide passive recreational uses that are more aligned to natural areas such as hiking, picnicking, wildflower viewing, and birdwatching - not irrigated, nor are there active park amenities such as playground equipment, outdoor grills or fire pits.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

To protect and enhance the natural, cultural, and scenic resources unique to the Town of Palmer Lake through:

- Thoughtful land acquisition;
- Appropriate land stewardship;
- Sustainable management.

in order to:

- Provide exceptional passive recreational opportunities;
- Preserve open space and wildlife habitat;
- Connect the community with each other and the natural environment;
- Respect the nearby residents.

Taking this context into consideration, the OSMP intends to:

- Define Palmer Lake's mission for open space management and identify objectives and strategies to satisfy its mission;
- Adhere to federal, state, and regional regulations and guidance as applicable;

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- Provide sustainable actions to manage natural areas well into the future; and
- Identify a framework and tools to aid in ecological assessments and monitoring

Palmer Lake is a community which recognizes the importance of:

- Conserving and enhancing its historic small-town character, the roots from which it grew, preserving the natural environment in which it resides;
- A caring community which offers its residents an environment in which to seek a high quality of life;
- A balanced community with a diverse range of housing, employment, educational, shopping, and recreational opportunities; and
- A vital community which provides financial and social support for quality of life

Once PLP&T has more guidance from the BOT we will outline in more detail:

#### GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OPEN SPACE

#### Stewardship of the Natural Environment

#### Protected Lands Program

General Management Objectives for:

Vegetation

Restoration and enhancement

Open Space Management Plan

Maintenance of Primitive Trails

Maintenance of Picnic Areas and Benches

Maintenance of Hardscapes - parking areas, trailheads, ADA designated areas

Fencing and Signage

Control of Hazardous Weeds

#### **Zones - areas divided into zones for recreational use and maintenance**

Maintenance/Use zones will inform Town management objectives and public access policies, in turn it can help improve efficiency by focusing efforts where it is needed most.

Specifically, proposed use/maintenance zones may be used to:

- Identify high public use areas;
- Protect ecologically sensitive areas;
- Designate the level of maintenance intensity required within each zone; and
- Track the acreage associated with each maintenance zone across the Town's open space.

Additionally, if the Town determines an average cost per acre associated with each management zone, this method can be used to support budget forecasting for annual maintenance/use activities.

**PLP&T would like to see the park & trails open space areas addressed in this concept preserved permanently for future generations.**

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Maintenance/use zones can be a valuable planning and evaluation tool that can scale as the Town's open space portfolio grows.

**PROPOSED USE/MAINTENANCE ZONE DESCRIPTIONS**

Rating	Allocation	Public Use	Description
Zone 0	Closed	Very Limited	Access restricted due to lack of public amenities, wildlife refuge, safety concerns, etc.
Zone 1	Protected	Limited	Areas with high conservation value. Access & amenities limited to designated trails and benches.
Zone 2	Nature Escape Sensory Garden	Moderate	Off-trail access permitted for passive recreation activities such as wildlife & wildflower viewing, serenity path, nature education.
Zone 3	Passive Recreation Area	Moderate to active	Developed areas which receive moderate use and provide access to picnic areas, open pavilion (available for small group rental), creekside benches, trails, etc.
Zone 4	Athletic	Active	Sports field

**Description of possible amenities and /or needs for each zone:**

Zone 0: limited use single track trail for maintenance, signage, designated wildlife refuge

Zone 1: Strategic mowing, 2-3' each side of single track trails, natural areas leave wild except for mowing strategically as outlines in more detailed maintenance description. Wildflower ID signage, plant native grasses and pollinator plants, remove noxious/invasive weeds, Place 2-3 benches along the east fence and in the oak groves with views toward the mountains and Ben Lomond, benches placed below the PS area facing the south, SW.

Zone 2: Single track nature trail with education and ID signage. No benches, tables etc.

Zone 3: Picnic tables (away from the creek, in the shade, spaced well away from each other on the space left by the cabin foundations removal), Bear proof trash cans (2) placed at either end of the area, benches along the creek and trail (2-4 to start), benches (1-2) above the USAFA bridge #1 area along the trail with views of the mountains, 1-2 along the trail above the Willan's property. Open pavilion & trails along the creek, 1 porta potty with wooden tasteful surround placed at the east end of the area where it can be serviced easily, stone barriers/gates placed at both ends of the area to limit vehicle traffic to PLPD, PLFD, PLPW, and PLSD, create a boulder barrier/fence along the east boundary of Zone 3, remove the fire ring near the pavilion, plant ground cover or use PLFD generated wood chips, from mitigation, where the cabin foundations were.

if the large buildings are torn down we see that area becoming a Zone 1 -3, Passive Recreation with perhaps two open air pavilions with picnic tables and benches in the shaded areas

Zone 4: work with athletic clubs and organizations to renovate the ball-field and a parking area adjacent to it. Apply for funding, grants as they become available.

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### **Additional notes/suggestions/vision from PLP&T Commission Workshop 11/26/2024**

The PLP&T Commission reiterated that the overall concept would be of a mainly “passive park” that contains no playground equipment, athletic courts, hosting of large events, etc. as these facilities are available in Glen Park, Centennial Parks, or Columbine Park.

A. Where the former cabin foundations are, everyone felt that leaving them with planted ground cover, sand, or wood-chips as the surface would mean less or no maintenance. Primary uses would be for picnicking (tables from logs at the reservoir with help from PLFD and PLPW), possibly horse shoe pit on one or two. Need for bear proof trash cans and pet waste station(s). Parking possible for 4-5 cars in the area just inside the USAFA bridge where it is flat - up for discussion. Create a weather or rest shelter out of the chicken coop just inside the USAFA bridge #1. Possible memorial garden, serenity path on the hill below the lodge where the PLFD cleared scrub oak this summer. The memorial garden idea was mentioned by one of the victims of the Living Word Chapel abuse - Reid to follow up to get the contact info. Caution in the creation of the memorial garden is needed especially if there is going to be a plaque of some sort (regarding the wording).

B. Benches along the creek, above the aforementioned parking area, along the trail, especially the east and northeast sections at beautiful view spots toward the mountains, with enough space between them to afford uninterrupted appreciation of the natural surroundings and views . The benches would be constructed of wood harvested from the Upper Reservoir in partnership with the PLFD and PLPW as part of the mitigation of the logs.

C. Initially one information kiosk just inside the USAFA bridge #1 showing trails with difficulty symbols, rules, facilities, cautions. Once the rest of the property use is decided a second kiosk would be erected at the shared parking lot with Public Safety area near the trail at the entrance onto State Hwy 105.

D. Additional detailed information, uses, maintenance will be included in the overall vision once decided upon, including the athletic field which the PLP&T Commission would like to leave natural for the time being and work on renovating it with a partnership at a future date.

E. Leave the rest of the property north of the large buildings in their natural state with a “strategic mowing plan” developed with Public Works. Do strategic planting of native grasses and pollinator plants.

F. If at some point it seems financially, culturally, and environmentally advisable the area on the east side of the driveway and north of the Willan’s Eco Spa, could be used for small scheduled open air music events as Parks’ fundraisers, a la Dirty Woman Park or Larkspur, with a portable stage.

A much more detailed plan for this vision of the maintenance and use zones and quarterly reviews/ updates of progress can be provided the BOT by PLP&T if this vision is approved.

### **What are we currently doing or plan do this this year:**

Continuing to renovate the open air pavilion	Stream clean-up
Clean up foundation sites - glass, metal, cement	Research ground cover for the sites
Build and install benches along the trail	Sign placement
Trail safety improvements	Research possible 3rd USAFA bridge site
Limb up and thin out the oak groves and clusters, but not remove the trees totally.	

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Added details:

On the included map you will note:

1. The addition of likely bench placements,
2. Information kiosk placement,
3. Restroom with a tasteful surround - a la tennis court, placement,
4. Designation of utility / emergency road through passive recreation zone 3 with gates similar to the ones currently used in Centennial Park at either end
5. Picnic table likely placement
6. Permanent trail easement on the Burlidge fence line -east side of property, 25 - 30' asked for.
7. Additional Zone 0 in NW corner of the property
8. Sign placement will be finished in short order including ones that say:
  - A. "Please don't feed the animals. Thank you"
  - B. "Please respect private property"
  - C. "Please pick-up after your dogs"
  - D. Trail difficulty and directional arrows
  - E. "Dogs must be on leash at all times"
  - F. Trail name and mileage