



March 30, 2026

City of Mountain View
City Hall, 500 Castro Street PO Box 7540
Mountain View, CA 94039-7540

Re: Parks and Rec Strategic Plan Draft Comments

Dear City Staff,

GreenSpacesMV is a volunteer organization consisting primarily of Mountain View residents—direct stakeholders in what happens in our city. Many of us have been closely following the development of Mountain View's Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan and providing feedback along the way. We would like to sincerely thank city staff for their hard work throughout this process. With each new iteration, we have seen a genuine effort to incorporate feedback from the community. The current version of the plan has greatly improved since the initial draft released in the fall of 2025, especially in elevating the importance of green and natural spaces.

However, before the plan is adopted, we still feel like there are a few areas where it can be strengthened to more closely align with community feedback and ensure that commitments to biodiversity and natural spaces translates to meaningful outcomes.

Firstly we want to ensure that councilmembers are aware of the current inequity of park distribution across the city. As identified in the plan, several planning areas in northern and western Mountain View are significantly underserved (Pg. 91). Residents living in these planning districts are concerned that the plan does not outline a reliable path forward nor a guaranteed funding source for creating new park space in their neighborhoods. They have raised this issue in every feedback cycle, both to the PRC and City Council and have not yet had their concerns addressed. We support the PRC's amendment to incorporate into the plan ways to prioritize expansion of parks and open space to underserved areas. As housing inventory is added, which looks to be largely in these underserved planning areas, lack of a significant addition to park space will have an increasing impact on residents.

We support the suggestion that Councilmember Hicks made during City Council's Study Session of the plan: that the park design section (section 6.2) should include examples of "natural parks". Currently, the illustration for each park type shows a very similar design—one where man-made amenities such as playgrounds, courts, and grass fields are the main focus

and natural spaces are placed at the borders. It would be more aligned with feedback from the public to see that image flipped, where natural spaces are the main attraction in the park and man-made amenities are fewer and along the edges. The building of a “natural park” could then be added as a one of the actions of Goal #1.

In a similar vein, the plan could benefit from addressing artificial turf and poured-in-place rubber (PIP) surfaces, currently ubiquitous in Mountain View Parks. Artificial turf and PIP are harmful to humans and the environment in many ways. They release toxic chemicals and heavy metals, they create urban heat islands, and they eliminate all habitat. Artificial turf also increases the number of sports injuries compared to natural grass. You can read more about these harms in the [white paper](#) released by the Santa Clara County Medical Association, who recommends artificial turf no longer be used. It would be great if this plan could commit to not using artificial turf in Mountain View Parks and take some first steps towards building playgrounds that are not so reliant on PIP. We suggest committing to a pilot project with a PIP-free park or playground, a relatively risk-free way of weaning ourselves of this harmful material. This could be a part of the natural park design suggested above.

We also support the Parks and Recreation Commission's amendment to pursue a citywide strategy of incremental improvements across all parks, including expanded native planting and increased tree canopy. This approach would ensure that all neighborhoods see steady improvements, even when larger capital projects occur on a longer schedule. We would, however, like to emphasize the importance of these new plants and trees being native. Currently, the Plan highlights community interest in “tree canopy, native planting, and biodiversity” (p. 10), but the guidance would be stronger if it explicitly prioritized locally native species appropriate to the Santa Clara Valley. Locally native plants support far more insects, birds, and other wildlife than non-native species and are essential for achieving Goal #2 outlined in the Plan.

These incremental improvements can also include modifications to park maintenance routines. Currently, the city still uses toxins to manage pests and weeds. City staff claim that they are “safe” and “organic” but many of the chemicals have not been thoroughly tested for impacts on children’s long term health, and we know that many organic substances can still be dangerous. Additionally, the city has a routine practice of removing all dropped leaves from parks and replacing them with mulch. This interrupts the life cycle of insects that are the foundation of the food web in our ecosystem, ultimately reducing the number of birds in our parks. If done properly, going toxin free and reducing unnecessary leaf litter removal could also reduce the demand for maintenance work, allowing park workers to support other initiatives identified in the plan.

The Plan could also more clearly recognize the role of parks as part of a connected habitat network. While the document acknowledges that parks support biodiversity and habitat, small urban parks function best ecologically when they are connected through green corridors such as creeks, trails, and street tree networks. Explicitly recognizing habitat connectivity would help ensure that future park design and improvements contribute to a citywide ecological network.

The Plan discusses where lighting may be added for safety and recreation, but it would also be helpful to recognize that some areas of parks should remain unlit. As the City advances its biodiversity goals, guidance identifying where dark areas should be preserved—such as along creek corridors and habitat areas—would help reduce impacts on wildlife.

The Plan notes that additional staff capacity may be needed in areas including biodiversity expertise (p. 11). We encourage the City to clarify how this expertise will be incorporated and whether the process will include transparency and opportunities for public input.

One concern the GreenSpacesMV members have brought up in the past, but still feel hasn't been properly resolved is the plan's focus on shade structures (as opposed to trees) as a priority amenity. Trees provide so much more to the community than just shade, including air filtration, oxygen, carbon sequestration, stormwater benefits, and habitat. A shade structure only provides shade. Additionally, the temperature under a shade structure is still quite a bit higher than in the shade of a tree because shade structures often trap heat, especially when they are located over rubber surfaces common at playgrounds. Evapotranspiration from trees, on the other hand, provide additional cooling beyond shade. Moreover, feedback from Mountain View residents clearly indicates that trees are much more important than shade structures (pg. 187, 202). The [PRC and Community Feedback Summary](#) states that the current version of Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan addresses this concern.

However, certain sections of the plan are still written with a preference for shade structures because they provide a quick solution for high use areas. For example, the plan's functionality guidelines state, "Use shade structures in locations where reliable or immediate shade is needed – such as over play areas, seating or high-use gathering spaces – and rely on tree canopy where long-term shade and ecological benefits can be achieved" (Pg. 101). People much prefer trees over shade structures over play areas, seating, and high-use gathering spaces for the reasons stated above. Relegating trees to areas away from where people gather is the opposite of what people are looking for when they come to the park. The more trees can be integrated into the park infrastructure, the more they can be enjoyed by all park users. We would like to see the wording of this section be more along the lines of: "Heritage trees, which already have large canopies, should be protected to provide shade over play areas, seating or high use spaces. They can be supplemented with new tree plantings where necessary. Shade structures should only be used when the existing and newly planted trees do not provide enough shade for a given location." Similar wording that prioritizes trees over shade structures should also be used when describing potential amenities for each park type in section 6.2: Park Design Guidelines.

Another concern that has been raised by members in the past, but have still not gotten clarity on, is why skate parks are listed as a priority amenity in section 7.4 and in Action 1.2.7, when the community feedback surveys (Pg. 187, 224) indicated them as the lowest importance to Mountain View residents. Adult fitness areas are also a low priority for Mountain View residents but are included as priority amenities in the plan. On the other hand, the community feedback

surveys indicated that walking paths, trees, and benches, are top priorities for Mountain View residents (Pg. 243) and yet are not included in Action 1.2.7. This may sound nitpicky, but we want to ensure that the city doesn't end up prioritizing its limited resources on amenities that are not needed or desired.

Thank you for taking these suggestions into consideration. We hope to see them included in the final version of the plan that will be brought to City Council in May.

Sincerely,
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