



August 18, 2008

Dear Members of the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission,

After reviewing the final Master Management Plan (MMP), the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the response to comments, Friends of Bidwell Park have noticed a number of questions that were left unanswered and/or were not adequately answered. We request that you take the time to review our concerns and provide more suitable explanations for the sake of clarification.

First, we have noticed there have been deletions and additions to the MMP since we reviewed the original draft. We are very concerned about this because we have no way of knowing what exactly has been added and deleted without reviewing a marked-up version. We believe one addition in particular, which states the Park should ... “Provide recreational opportunities for Chico residents and others in the Park that currently are not provided for in other local settings” is a significant addition that was not subject to review and comment during the formal CEQA review process. We question the legality of these types of changes and we can’t help but wonder what else has been changed without giving the public their due process to review and comment on changes. **Will the consultant provide a marked-up version so that all changes can be reviewed?**

Second, the document is ambiguous and contradictory as to whether or not future intensive-recreational developments will be allowed in Upper Park or not. We want this issue resolved because the Butte County Habitat Conservation Plan is declaring Upper Bidwell Park as “protected” in their draft reports. We believe that this is inappropriate if the MMP leaves the door open to future intensive-recreational developments (as opposed to just allowing non-intensive uses such as hiking, biking and horse riding on approved and well-maintained trails). If you choose to allow consideration of future intensive-recreational developments in Upper Park, then the City must tell Butte County to remove Bidwell Park from the Habitat Conservation Plan and stop claiming that Upper Park will be managed in a way that will enhance the recovery of the numerous species covered under the Habitat Conservation Plan as legally required to qualify as “protected.” Please make a definitive answer, as it is a waste of everyone’s time and money to keep trying to play Bidwell Park both ways. **Does the City pledge to manage Upper Bidwell Park in a manner that meets the legal requirements of a protected area?**

The following are the more specific questions and concerns we have identified so far. We will submit other questions as soon as possible for your responses.

The EIR

1. Suggests transplanting of rare, wild plants (Butte County Checkerbloom) as mitigation in some circumstances (Mit. Meas. Bio 1C, pg. E4-55). **Can the City demonstrate that their transplantation of rare plants have been successful elsewhere?**
2. Makes no schedule for monitoring populations of Butte County Checkerbloom, Bidwell's Knotweed, or Oak trees, despite a claim that such adaptive management methods are a mandatory mitigation. (Mit. Meas. Bio-1b, pg.E4-54). References to I.DG/T-1(pg 3-54 Final Draft Plan) are given when commentary's question the specifics of mitigation and monitoring, yet I.DG/T-1 contains no specifics – not even when monitoring will occur, or by whom (pg.3-380 Final EIR). **Since the City publically claims it does not have the staff and money to monitor current mitigation sites, are we to assume the City will not have the staff and money to meet this mitigation requirement?**
3. Argues that despite Park 'improvement' projects having direct impacts though loss of habitat and increased localized habitat fragmentation, effects on listed bird species are insignificant because 'suitable habitat would not be removed in substantial quantities'. (Impact Bio-2F, pg. E4-70). **We are not talking about direct removal of habitat. Is the City claiming that Disc Golf will not negatively impact foraging/nesting birds on a continuous basis, year after year?**
4. Claims overall footprint of area affected by disc golf play will be reduced by plan implementation. (Impact Bio-6, pg. E4-84). However, just because an old area of use is abandoned, that doesn't mean it has suddenly reverted to unaffected habitat. It may take years to recover and may require direct intervention to counter the establishment of invasive plants. **Is the City really claiming the compacted soil will simply become un-compacted and that the visual negative impacts of large barren areas will suddenly improve?**
5. Despite acknowledging that fire danger in Upper Park is generally considered high (Impact PS-1, page E4-53), the EIR claims that 6" of wood chips applied within the drip-lines of Blue Oaks at the proposed disc golf site, will not significantly increase fuels. The City claims woodchips are no more a fire threat than dried vegetation. **Does the City believe 6 inches of wood chips would not burn when vegetation is still green? Does the City not believe that the intensity of the heat would be hotter and longer in duration than a fast moving grass fire, and that severe damage to the soil could result when a fire does occur?**
6. Despite identifying the breakage of Blue Oak's branches, meristems and bark as potential sources of premature death, no mitigation is proposed for the branches and meristems. **The arborist report clearly states the most significant negative impacts to trees are from loss branches and meristems. Shouldn't the City be honest and state there is no feasible mitigation for these impacts?**

7. Unclear where Oak- trunk shielding posts will be installed, if any. The City fails to define the exact nature and design of shields, how many will be needed, and how they will be installed. **How can the public tell if this mitigation will be feasible with so little information?**
8. Unclear where wood chips will be introduced at tree drip-lines (e.g. which trees). (Master response 4, pg. 3-17 Final EIR). **How can we determine the amount and cost of this mitigation and whether or not it is feasible?**
9. Acknowledges impacts to aesthetics that result from disc golf, but rationalizes this by assuming disc golf is a pre-existing condition, rather than a consideration of a previously unauthorized use. (Master response 5, pg. 3-17, Final EIR). The City documents do not record this as an existing use in the City Council minutes taken during the purchase from BLM nor is it mentioned in the original Mitigation Negative Declaration of the project in 2002. **Is the City claiming that they bear no responsibility for the severe damage that they now clearly admit has occurred there, while they illegally allowed the courses to grow and function without any regulations?**
10. Acknowledges that blue oak sapling recruits would not likely get established in the fairways, nor survive long term if established. Once again, mitigation is characterized as successful based on a lessening of current impacts from established use intensities (3-215, Final EIR). **Doesn't this imply that the Oak Woodland at this site will diminish in size and quality as century old trees die and will not be replaced with natural regeneration?**
11. Claims the square yardage of impacts around the targets (pins) is not known, again: a reduction of 'current' impacts is cited. (3-216, Final EIR). **How does the City make the claim that the area of impacts will be less by redesigning the courses without calculating the area of potential impacts?**
12. States that small trucks will be used to deliver Disc Golf course construction materials to site, but does not elaborate (3-216, Final EIR). Obviously a road will be required to designate the route the trunk will use to access all the locations which require mulch, boulders to delineate fairways, etc. A new road was never discussed in the original plan, nor were the potential impacts addressed (e.g. soil compaction, road ruts, impacts to rare plants etc.) **Shouldn't the City elaborate on this serious oversight, especially considering the significant impacts that will likely occur by installing a road at this sensitive location?**
13. Makes claim that City 'strived' to find an alternative location for a full sized disc golf course, even though the City was made aware by preservationists of the '1st and Verbena' Park site, prior to the development of a specific plan for that site. Other locations were suggested as well, as can be seen on the FOBP website: <http://www.friendsofbidwellpark.org/discgolffletter072505.pdf> from July 25th, 2005. **Shouldn't Dennis Beardsley acknowledge that Friends of Bidwell Park were attempting to work with the Disc Golf community to identify other suitable locations when Lon Glazner suddenly demanded we stop, accusing us of conducting back door deals with the City?**

14. Claims the 1990 BPMMP did not contain objectives that would adequately address all resource issues, and claims the overarching 'Park wide goals and objectives' of that Plan do not apply to the lands purchased subsequently (3-355 Final EIR), despite statements by Park Director Dennis Beardsley in a City Memorandum dated November 28th, 2004, that claimed such Parkwide Goals and Objectives and also land-use designations applicable to the Park were immediately applied to the new additions. As an example, here is 1990's objective #2.3- 6, "Redesign, relocate, or discontinue the use of facilities known to contribute substantially to the decline of natural features or conditions." This Objective was deleted from the Draft Plan!. Example #2: "Remove unauthorized roads and trails." This Objective from the 1990 Plan was also removed! ; Also see 1990 BPMMP 'Issue 3, pg.154, that refers to the as-of-that-time unpurchased lands south of Big Chico Creek in Upper Park, and the warnings that 'important plant species exist here, the need for firm restrictions on future use, and the need to identify future management costs.' Does the City now claim that the 1990 BPMMP was/is not the guiding document for management of subsequent Bidwell Park additions, despite written city documents and statements by its Park Director?
15. Fails to state the seed source for on-site restoration of fairways abandoned due to proposal redesign. How can we determine if this will not be a negative impact by bringing in non-native species or genetically different species from other locations?
16. Despite the Trails Plan's discussion of user patterns that result in unauthorized trails, the Final EIR claims that "concern over future unauthorized trails is speculative. " Is the City going to monitor and correct un-authorized use of trails, especially considering the extensive ongoing damage that is currently occurring by ignoring this problem?
17. Cites examples of DG courses that do not have adverse effects on natural resources in City of Arcata's redwood forest and City of Truckee along Truckee River (03-19). Both of these examples are in wetter and lush ecosystems, and are not appropriate to use as examples for arid blue oak areas with brittle vegetation as along Hwy. 32. Is the City claiming these sites are comparable?
18. Trash cans would be installed at "strategic" locations around site. Number not stated, but stated number might increase. States cans would be emptied on a schedule as needed [03-27(51)] Will trash cans will be emptied using a vehicle, which could further increase road development and damage to soils and plants?
19. Development of site is intended to accommodate existing use, not increase use at site (03-45). No data exists as to current use of site. It is very unreasonable to presume that improvements in parking and tees would not increase the present usage. EIR comments from public actually point to an increase in usage, including tournaments. Will tournaments (local, regional, state, national and international) be allowed and advertised or not?