



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Jon Cicirelli

SUBJECT: Overfelt Gardens Park
Master Plan Update

DATE: May 12, 2025

Approved

Date:

5/20/25

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 5

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the Overfelt Gardens Park Master Plan Update.

SUMMARY AND OUTCOME

Overfelt Gardens Park, a cherished 33-acre regional park in East San José, requires significant attention to address its deteriorating condition and restore its historical and cultural significance. The Master Plan Update, Attachment A, offers a comprehensive roadmap that rehabilitates and enhances the park, emphasizes maintenance, preserves key features, and creates strategic additions. With input from the community and stakeholders, the Master Plan Update outlines themed districts, prioritizes repairs, and proposes improvements such as botanical gardens, walking trails, and cultural programming.

The City Council's approval of the recommendation will formalize the commitment to restore Overfelt Gardens Park by providing clear guidance for future projects to preserve its unique character, improve visitor experiences, and ensure long-term sustainability. There are no specific projects being proposed as part of the update, future projects will be subject to separate review and approval.

BACKGROUND

Overfelt Gardens Park is an existing 33-acre regional park situated within City Council District 5 in East San José. The site is bounded by McKee Road to the south, Independent High School campus to the north, Educational Park Drive to the west, and the Valley Medical Health Center East Valley campus to the east. The park offers

cultural elements that provide visitors a space for learning, reflection, and a serene, natural environment. A location map is included in Attachment B.

Mildred Overfelt, daughter of William and Mary Overfelt, granted 33 acres of her parents' farmland to the City of San José for a park to be developed in honor of her parents in 1959. As a condition of the gift, the park was to be developed in a passive manner with a specific restriction on sports fields. The park, with its collections of gardens, opened to the public in 1966 per the park's first master plan.

In the early 1970s to 1980s, several structures were donated to the City by the Taiwanese (Republic of China) government under a goodwill program. These structures were installed at the park and defined as the Chinese Cultural Garden. In 1985, the Overfelt family home, constructed in 1876, was designated as Historic Landmark No. 30 by the City Council. City Council approved several master plan updates over the past 50 years, each with specific objectives and goals.

The park requires significant investment to preserve or alter some park features to remain available to the public. Below are two examples.

- In 2014, the City prepared a Conditions Assessment of the Chinese-style buildings and monuments. The Conditions Assessment documented the work and cost required to preserve each structure. A budget has yet to be appropriated.
- As part of the preparation for the Master Plan Update, staff determined that the existing water supply to the park's multiple ponds was no longer available. This has led to a deterioration of pond water quality in recent years and varying water levels based on annual rainfall.

The Master Plan Update prioritizes future investments to either 1) sustain, repair, and restore park features, or 2) introduce supplemental features to increase regular users and visitors to the park.

ANALYSIS

The Master Plan Update process began with a comprehensive inventory of existing park amenities and conditions. The plan evaluated the following features.

Rose Garden	Iris Garden
Fountain Memorial	Palm Grove
Nature Trail and Native Planting Area	Overfelt House
Picnic Area	Chiang Kai Shek Memorial
Sun Yat Sen Memorial	Plum Pavilion
Confucius Statue	Friendship Gate
Black Stone Sculpture	3 Ponds

To supplement visual observations, staff sought input from a range of stakeholders, including Park Managers, Maintenance Supervisors, adjacent neighbors (school and county health), and the Chinese Cultural Gardens organization that has supported programming at the park.

After an assessment of General Plan goals, ActivateSJ guiding principles and goals, and feedback from City staff, the team was prepared to engage with the community to seek input on preferences, options, and general feedback about the park.

The project team gathered opinions and comments from the public. Community input on preferred park elements and priorities are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Preferred Park Elements and Priorities

Discussion Topics	Community Responses in Order of Preference
What are your favorite features of Overfelt Park?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ponds • Chinese Cultural Pavilions and Monuments • Paths • Gardens • Picnic Area
Given that the deed for the park limits active uses, are there any park features you would like to see added to the park?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Botanical garden • Walking trail • Cultural events or other small events • Educational and interpretive exhibits • Children's features • Performance space • Rental space opportunities for gatherings • Small group games such as bocce, croquet, horseshoes • More picnic areas • Other
What would encourage you to visit the park more often?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level of landscaping and maintenance • Greater sense of security and safety • On-site stewards (Park Ranger) • More things to do
Why do you visit Overfelt Park?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enjoy nature (bird watching, open space) • Exercise (walking, jogging) • Family time (picnic, play) • Meditation • Special events • Other

Community feedback from two surveys (with 101 and 120 respondents, respectively) highlights the valued features and potential improvements for Overfelt Gardens Park. According to the surveys, key attractions include the ponds, Chinese cultural pavilions

and monuments, and the paths, with visitors primarily coming to the park for the following reasons: to enjoy nature, exercise, spend family time, meditation, special events, and other activities.

Respondents expressed a strong interest in adding a botanical garden, walking trails, and cultural or small events, along with enhancements like improved landscaping and maintenance, greater security and safety, and on-site stewardship.

These findings suggest that Overfelt Gardens Park is cherished for its attractions and open space. After incorporating community feedback on the preferred elements and priorities and after considering City processes and funding, the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department prepared the Master Plan Update to provide direction for maintenance priorities and amenity enhancements as resources permit.

Section 4.1 of the Master Plan Update describes the ideas and themes to be developed. The plan calls for five distinct districts with themed gardens:

1. Cultural District;
2. Botanical Garden District;
3. Chinese Cultural Gardens;
4. Nature District; and
5. Civic District.

The five districts will feature garden spaces and architecture, but the overall park landscape will be unified with a consistent landscape plan and aesthetic approach. The park's common design language will be found through consistent use of paving material, fencing, and common support amenities like trash receptacles and directional signage. This Master Plan Update prioritizes infrastructure in the greatest need of repair/restoration, followed by the addition of park amenities. The list of priorities is accompanied by approximate cost estimates in Section 6 of the plan.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The Overfelt Gardens Park Master Plan Update was reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Commission in June 2024. Approval of the Master Plan Update will provide a guideline on maintaining and restoring the park in the future when funding is available.

COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATIONS

There are no cost impacts for the recommended approval of the Overfelt Gardens Park Master Plan Update.

COORDINATION

This project has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, City Manager's Budget Office, City Manager's Office of Economic Development (Real Estate), City Council District 5 Office, Planning, Building and Code Enforcement, and Public Works.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This memorandum will be posted on the City's Council Agenda website for the June 3, 2025 City Council meeting.

The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department hosted three virtual community meetings and two online surveys to engage the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, as described in Table 2. Three community meetings were conducted on weekday evenings to maximize participation.

Table 2 – Community Outreach

Workshop	Purpose	Date
1	Site Analysis, Desires, Considerations	February 10, 2021
2	Proposed Improvements	May 20, 2021
3	Preferred Plan	April and May 2023

Meetings were announced on the City website and social media, and mailers were sent to approximately 500 residences in the vicinity of the park. The two online surveys were conducted via Survey Monkey to expand the opportunity for community participation.

This memorandum was posted on the Parks and Recreation Commission webpage for its June 5, 2024, meeting agenda.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT

On June 5, 2024, the Parks and Recreation Commission voted 9-0-2 (Commissioners Campbell and Morrow absent) to accept the recommended actions related to Overfelt Master Plan Update.

Public comments at the meeting included support for the Master Plan Update and also suggested that the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department collaborate with Transportation Department to install a crosswalk or ramp to connect Overfelt Gardens Park to Penitencia Creek Trail.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-001, Feasibility and Planning Studies with no commitment to future actions.

PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING

This item does not include a public subsidy as defined in section 53083 or 53083.1 of the California Government Code or the City's Open Government Resolution.

/s/
Jon Cicirelli
Director, Parks, Recreation and
Neighborhood Services Department

The principal author of this memorandum is Han-Lei Wang, Associate Landscape Architect, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department. For questions, please contact by email at han-lei.wang@sanjoseca.gov or (408) 933-8654.

ATTACHMENT

Attachment A - Overfelt Gardens Park Master Plan Update
Attachment B - Overfelt Location Map