



## City Council Staff Report

**Report Type: ACTION ITEMS**  
**Lead Department: Community Services**

**Meeting Date: March 4, 2024**  
Report #:2402-2669

### TITLE

Adopt a Park Dedication Ordinance for the Tower Well site, 0.19 acres of land (8,437 square feet) at 201 Alma Street and approve the proposed name “Tower Well Park” as Recommended by the Parks and Recreation Commission. CEQA status - not a project.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Parks and Recreation Commission and staff recommend that the City Council adopt a Park Dedication Ordinance (Attachment A) for the Tower Well site, 0.19 acres of land (8,437 square feet) at 201 Alma Street and approve the proposed name “Tower Well Park.”

### BACKGROUND

This item was previously on the January 22, 2024 City Council Agenda as a consent item. The item was pulled by three Councilmembers (Burt, Lythcott-Haims, and Veenker) and is now brought forward as an Action Item.

The Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) 2023-2024 Work Plan<sup>1</sup>, approved by the City Council, includes a goal of conducting a broad review and assessment of potential sites within Palo Alto to recommend dedicating as parkland. A Park Dedication Ordinance reserves the land for park, recreation, or conservation purposes. Article VIII of the City Charter states: “All lands owned or controlled by the city which are or will be used for park, playground, recreation or conservation purposes shall be dedicated for such purposes by ordinance.” Additionally, the Charter states that all dedicated parklands shall be listed, with their legal description and map, in Section 22 of the Municipal Code. The proposed site is currently functioning as a park; however, the land is currently not designated as parkland. Historically, the City Council considered selling the property in 1992 but rejected three proposals to purchase the property because they did not preserve the Tower. In February 1996 the City Council discussed proposed concepts for use of the Tower Well site, and as a result of that discussion, in June 1996 a Request for Proposal (RFP) for an option to purchase the Tower Well site was released. In February 1997 there was a recommendation from

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<sup>1</sup> Parks and Recreation Commission 2023-2024 Workplan,  
<https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/viewer?id=1819&type=2>

staff to accept a proposal from Thomas and Kathleen Taylor for an option to purchase the Tower Well site for \$100,000. There was a sizable amount of public comment and discussion, and a motion was made to continue the discussion to a later meeting. Ultimately, the City Council rejected the four proposals in a 4-5 split vote. In April 1999 the City Council approved an offer to perform a structural analysis of the Tower Well. With the integrity of the Tower passing, in 2000 the City Council decided to preserve the site and honor the historic Tower Well and transition the function of the site to a park and plaza.

## **ANALYSIS**

On October 24, 2023, the PRC discussed dedicating the Tower Well site as parkland. The Commission was supportive of the PRC Park Dedication Ad Hoc Committee (Ad Hoc) and staff's recommendation to dedicate the site. Commissioners asked what costs would be associated with dedicating the site as parkland. Staff explained that the only near-term cost would be adding a park sign, which would cost approximately \$2,500. The site has several existing park amenities: a decomposed granite pathway, six interpretive signs, two park benches, and landscaping. Commissioners also asked about the existing cost of the maintenance for the site. The Tower Well site is maintained as part of a contract managed by the Community Services Department. The annual cost for the maintenance of the site (landscaping, trash and litter collection, and general maintenance) is approximately \$7,000 per year. On October 27, 2023, the Ad Hoc and staff consulted with Darla Secor, Historian with the Palo Alto Historical Association (PAHA), to seek a name recommendation for the potential park at the Tower Well site. The City's Naming Policy (Attachment B) establishes criteria which guides the PAHA and the appropriate City Commission or Committee in recommending names to the Council for approval. The PAHA Board, noting the significant historic landmark on the property, recommends the name "Tower Well Park" (Attachment C). The PAHA Board explained in their November 8, 2023, letter to City Council, "When constructed in 1910, the water tower was the first major visible infrastructure of the City's utilities and is a symbol of the City's successful beginnings and forward-thinking leaders. The PAHA Board agrees that 'Tower Well Park' reflects the historic significance of this site."

On November 28, 2023, the PRC voted unanimously<sup>2</sup> (7-0) to approve the recommendation that the City Council adopt a Park Dedication Ordinance for the Tower Well site, 0.19 acres of land (8,437 square feet) at 201 Alma Street and approve the proposed name "Tower Well Park."

## **FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT**

The Community Services Department's existing operating budget will absorb the \$2,500 expense for adding a park sign at the site. The annual cost for the maintenance of site (landscaping, trash and litter collection, and general maintenance) is approximately \$7,000 per year and is already included in the CSD Operating Budget. At the PRC's November 28, 2023 meeting there was

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<sup>2</sup> Parks and Recreation Commission, November 28, 2023; Agenda Item #3; Minutes, [www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/parks-and-recreationcommission/agendas-minutes/2023-agendas-and-minutes/11-nov/prc-draft-minutes-11.28.23.pdf](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/parks-and-recreationcommission/agendas-minutes/2023-agendas-and-minutes/11-nov/prc-draft-minutes-11.28.23.pdf)

discussion about refreshing the landscaping, including adding a meditative space or Zen Garden. While there are currently no plans for park improvements, staff will consider the recommendations of the PRC and other community partners. Future improvements would either be absorbed by the Department's existing operating or capital budget, or funds would be requested through the annual budget process.

#### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Prior to the PRC November 28, 2023, meeting, a Tower Well Park Dedication Fact Sheet was posted at the site and on the PRC website. There were no public comments on this item at the PRC meeting. A public notice was mailed directly to 255 resident parcels within 500 ft of the 201 Alma Street site on December 19, 2023, advising of the proposed dedication ordinance. Staff reached out to the Utilities, Planning, and Public Works Departments to ensure that dedication of this site would not conflict with future planned projects. No conflicts were identified.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Council action on this item is not a project as defined by CEQA because Adopt a Park Dedication Ordinance for the Tower Well site is an administrative activity that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment. CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(5).

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Park Dedication Ordinance for Tower Well Site at 201 Alma Street

Attachment B: Policy Naming City Owned Land or Facilities

Attachment C: Letter from the Palo Alto Historical Association with Park Name Recommendation

Attachment D: Item Public Comment from 1/22/24

#### **APPROVED BY:**

Kristen O'Kane