

CLOVER TAKING OVER: Where Did the Grass Go in Davis Parks?

## **CLOVER TAKING OVER!**

Where Did the Grass Go in Davis Parks?

*May 16, 2022*



## SUMMARY

The 2021-22 Yolo County Grand Jury investigated the City of Davis Parks and Community Services Department (Parks). In particular, the grand jury sought to find out why the Davis parks show a significant lack of greenery during summer months. The grand jury also reviewed the 2018 Measure H spending to evaluate the effect that this parcel tax had on the overall parks operation. This measure was renewed in 2018 for a 20-year term at the current \$49 per parcel per year with a modest 2% increase annually.

The grand jury now recommends the following ideas to the City of Davis for improving our parks:

- address the weed infestation in the parks and green belts, with removal of weeds such as foxtails;
- restore turf grass areas and irrigation; promote volunteer programs already in place; use transparent bidding practices when hiring contractors;
- recruit to fill the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Specialist position or outsource this function; and
- publicize an annual Measure H spending report detailing expenditures and how Measure H specifically benefits the city's parks and aquatics centers.

## BACKGROUND

In 1998 Davis voters passed Measure H, "the park maintenance tax", which assessed an annual parcel fee of \$49 per parcel. Over the years this park tax was renewed by voters 4 times with no increase in the amount per parcel. When the park tax was passed it made a significant impact for maintaining the Davis parks. In 1998 the park tax covered 50% of the Parks budget. When Measure H was renewed by Davis voters in 2018, the \$49 parcel tax only covered 10%, or \$1.4 million, of the Parks budget of \$14.525 million.

Of the 2021 Parks management budget, \$7.7 million goes toward salaries and retirement of Parks staff; \$4.4 million goes toward a contractor to supplement the maintenance of parks and other areas; and \$1.8 million goes toward interdepartmental charges (funds paid by the Parks Department to other city departments, including Information Technology, Finance/Budget, Payroll, Fleet, Facility Maintenance, for providing support services).

As of April 2022, the Parks Division has a total of 18 full-time staff members and two-part time positions:

- 1 Parks Director
- 1 Parks Manager
- 1 Assistant Director
- 2 Park Supervisors (1 for maintenance, 1 for irrigation)
- 1 Crew Supervisor
- 4 Irrigation Specialists
- 8 Park Maintenance Workers
- Parks Maintenance Aide I/II (part-time/temporary) (vacant position)
- Parks Maintenance Aide (part-time) (vacant position)

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The Parks Director has offices in two locations: one at City Hall and the other at the Corporation Yard. The parks manager and assistant director are both located at the Corporation Yard. The park supervisors split their time between the field and the Corporation Yard doing administrative work. The crew supervisor, irrigation specialists and park maintenance staff all work directly in the field.

The city maintenance staff and contractor support the following municipal green space:

- 5 Community Parks, 89 acres
- 28 Neighborhood Parks, 135 acres
- 29 Greenbelts, 175 acres
- Streetscapes, 83 acres
- 14,556 street trees
- 8,964 Park and Greenbelt trees

According to park staff there is an annual shortfall of \$500,000 to \$800,000 for park maintenance. Davis parks are maintained using a combination of a contractor and City of Davis maintenance staff. The parks with the highest visibility (for example, Central Park) are maintained by City of Davis staff. The City of Davis uses one contractor, Brightview Landscape Services, to aid in maintaining the city parks. In the past the city has contracted with 2 outside businesses to help maintain city parks. While the city does have other sub-contractors they could use, only Brightview is completing maintenance outside of what city staff maintains. It is unclear if the City of Davis uses a competitive bidding process when awarding maintenance contracts.

In summer and fall months, there are significant dry areas in the majority of parks and green belts (Exhibit A). Bike/pedestrian paths in North Davis green belts were rebuilt in late 2019 and 2020. Lawns adjacent to these bike paths had the water turned off for months at a time during bike path construction; the grass died, and weeds took over. Once construction ended and the water was turned back on, there was no remediation to address the weed issue and restore the grass areas.

Play Fields Park in South Davis shows signs of deficient maintenance. Clover has completely taken over the two softball fields (Exhibit B). Mace Ranch Park shows signs of dryness in the summer and fall, with significant weeds taking over (Exhibit C). The soccer fields in Northstar Park have shown major wear and again the weeds have taken over (Exhibit D). The city has no plan for remediation.

Throughout the investigation and visitation of the parks, the grand jury noted that:

- The parks are clean, and graffiti is removed in a timely manner;
- Trash cans are placed at appropriate areas and trash is collected on a regular basis;
- Bathrooms in parks are kept clean and well maintained;
- Parks are mowed on a regular schedule;
- Grass areas are green during the winter months (However, upon close inspection the greenery is a mix of grass, weeds and clover);
- At times, non-grassy areas and cracks in pavement show significant weed growth (Exhibit E);

- Maintenance staff takes little action to remedy the parks' shortcomings including weed control in the turf areas of the green belts and parks;
- City staff repairs safety items first, then addresses other maintenance areas.

In January 2020 the Davis City Council voted to end the use of herbicide containing glyphosate (AKA Roundup). During this meeting it was recognized that there would be significant increase in costs to maintain the parks throughout Davis. According to *The Davis Aggie*:

“The Davis City Council did allow for the use of Tier 2 (moderate concern) pre-emergent herbicide... In addition to using Tier 2 pre-emergent herbicides, city staff added future goals for pesticide use in the city, including the development of an Integrated Pest Management Technical Advisory Committee and added mapping of pesticide hazard and reduction mapping. Ultimately, the city staff is looking to respond to the public's concerns with minimal use of pesticides.”<sup>1</sup>

Davis Parks staff has reported that the position of IPM Specialist has been recruited in the past but has been unsuccessful in filling this position. The City of Davis has budgeted for an IPM Specialist in the 2021-23 current budget. However, at the time of the writing of this report, this position has not been filled and there is no job opening for this position on the City of Davis website.<sup>2</sup>

Through investigation, the grand jury discovered that all capital projects are managed by the Public Works Department. The maintenance of city parks is the responsibility of the Parks and Community Services Department. There needs to be better communication between the Public Works Department and the Parks Department when capital projects affect both of these departments. For example, when the Public Works Department repaved the bike path, the Parks Department shut off the water, resulting in the death of the grass around the bike path. Better communication and collaboration between these departments would have prevented the loss of greenery.

## APPROACH

The grand jury investigated this matter using the following means:

- Publicly available data on various public websites: charters, planning documents, budgets, reports and meeting minutes.
- Data provided by the City of Davis website.
- Several visits to Davis parks between the months of August and December 2021.
- Interviews of city staff responsible for Davis park maintenance and related activities.

## DISCUSSION

1. Davis voters passed Measure H in 1998. It has subsequently been renewed every four or six years until 2018 when voters renewed the measure for a 20-year term with an annual 2% increase (Exhibit F).

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<sup>1</sup> TheDavisAggie.org, 2/24/2020

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/davis?page=1>, accessed May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

2. Davis municipal green space has grown by 30% since Measure H was passed in 1998.
3. When Measure H was passed in 1998 the \$49 annual parcel tax supported 50% of the parks budget. In 2021, Measure H funding provided only 10% of the parks budget.
4. Maintenance of Davis aquatic facilities are also funded through Measure H revenues.
5. Davis parks' appearance suffers from lack of adequate maintenance. An example of this is the predominance of clover in grass areas at Playfields Park in South Davis. This park is maintained by city staff. The desired balanced growth of clover and other grasses is not achieved due to lack of weeding, watering and maintenance.
6. During the winter of 2021-22 all of the observed parks had weed infestations in the grassy areas. Weeds also predominate on the periphery of the parks and greenbelts. High visibility parks (e.g., Central Park) were generally better maintained.
7. The maintenance work of most Davis parks is understaffed and underfunded.
8. Park maintenance staff prioritizes safety items over beautification.
9. Measure H funds are deposited into the Parks and Community Services General Fund with no expenditure itemization.
10. The full-time position of IPM Specialist is not currently filled nor is it currently advertised as a vacant career opportunity.
11. The volunteer opportunities for Park beautification offered by the City of Davis are not well publicized. Volunteer activities focus on issues such as trash-removal or clean-up events.

## **FINDINGS**

- F-1 The Davis Parks budget no longer adequately covers park maintenance throughout the year at satisfactory quality levels.
- F-2 Davis Parks greenery is unkempt and shows a lack of consistent maintenance.
- F-3 The City of Davis has been unsuccessful in hiring additional maintenance staff and an IPM Specialist, as outlined in the City of Davis Policy and Procedures.<sup>3</sup>
- F-4 Parks that are maintained by the City of Davis are better maintained than the parks that are serviced by the sole contractor.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://documents.cityofdavis.org/Media/Default/Documents/PDF/PW/Integrated%20Pest%20Management/07-IPM-Policy-ATT2-IPM-Policy-and-Procedures.pdf>

- F-5 The City of Davis does not have a transparent policy in place regarding the bidding process for the publicly funded contractor supporting the Parks department.
- F-6 Although the City of Davis has mechanisms in place to promote volunteerism to beautify parks, volunteer opportunities could be better promoted to the public.<sup>4</sup>
- F-7 There is lack of coordination between the Public Works Department and the Parks Department when capital projects within the park system take place. This leads to the lack of re-greenification of Davis parks.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R-1 The City of Davis should address the weed infestation in the parks and green belts, with removal of weeds and reinstall grass back to its original form by September 1, 2022.
- R-2 The City of Davis' competitive bidding process should be transparent when awarding contracts to this contractor and should provide an explanation of said process regarding by September 1, 2022.
- R-3 The City of Davis should actively recruit for the IPM Specialist position or in the absence of a qualified candidate, the City of Davis should outsource this position by September 1, 2022.
- R-4 The City of Davis Parks Department should actively promote civic pride and the volunteerism programs already in place such as ADOPT-A-PARK. Additional ideas for volunteer recruitments include:
  - enlisting Scout troops to help contain weed growth in the parks.
  - working with service clubs (e.g., Rotary, Lyons Club, Kiwanis) to help maintain the parks.
  - amplifying public service announcements encouraging "pull weeds in your neighborhood green belts and parks. "
- R-5 The City of Davis should publicize an annual Measure H spending report detailing expenditures as they specifically benefit the parks and aquatics centers.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cityofdavis.org/city-hall/parks-and-community-services/volunteer-opportunities>

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the County Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

The City of Davis Findings F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, Recommendations R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5

**EXHIBIT A:** North Davis Green Belts, taken in Oct 2021





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North Davis Green Belts, taken in Oct 2021



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**EXHIBIT B:** Play Fields in South Davis taken fall 2021



Heavy clover within the fields at Play Fields



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**EXHIBIT C:** Mace Ranch taken fall 2021



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**EXHIBIT D:** North Star Soccer Fields Fall of 2021



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North Star Soccer Fields Fall of 2021



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Photos taken in wintertime 2021 of North Star Soccer Fields



**EXHIBIT E:** North Davis Bike Path taken spring of 2202.



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**EXHIBIT F: Measure H 2018**

<https://www.cityofdavis.org/home/showpublisheddocument/17066/637800193630070000>



**Measure H  
2018 Parks Maintenance Tax**

**Ballot Language:**

Shall Ordinance 2521, which renews the existing Park Maintenance Tax of \$49 per year on residential units and on non-residential units in amounts specified in the Ordinance, for 20 years, adds an annual 2% inflator, and is expected to generate \$1.4 million in the first year to fund maintenance of parks, street trees, greenbelts, bike paths, medians, public landscaping, urban wildlife and habitat, swimming pools, and public recreational facilities, be adopted?

**What is the Parks Maintenance Tax (Measure H)?**

Measure H is a City ballot measure to renew the current Parks Maintenance Tax that was first approved by voters in 1998. Measure H will be on the June 5, 2018 ballot. It requires a two-thirds (66.67%) vote to pass.

**Is this a new tax and how much is it?**

No, this is not a new tax. It was approved by voters and has been in effect since 1998. Measure H would renew the existing Parks Maintenance Tax at the same rate of \$49 per residential parcel and \$40 per 1,000 sq. ft. for non-residential parcels. The following table compares the current tax with the proposed tax on the June ballot:

<b>Current Parks Tax</b>	<b>Proposed Parks Tax (Measure H)</b>
Single Family Residential - \$49 per house/year Multi-Family Residential - \$49 per unit/year Commercial - \$40 per 1,000 sf, to max of 10,000 sf.	Same
6 Year Sunset (expires June 2018)	20 Year Sunset (expires June 2038)
Low Income Provision	Same
No Annual Cost of Living adjustment	2%
Use of revenue is restricted to maintenance of parks, open space, greenbelts, medians, pools and recreation facilities	Same
2/3 voter approval required	Same

**How does the City use the revenue from the Parks Maintenance Tax?**

The Parks Maintenance Tax provides \$1.4 million annually, which currently pays for 18% of parks maintenance costs. The funds are dedicated to assisting with the maintenance of parks, street trees, greenbelts, bike paths, medians, public landscaping, urban wildlife and habitat, swimming pools, and public recreational facilities in the community, such as building in parks, play structures, and courts and fields. As a special tax, revenues must be spent only for these purposes.

Since the initial Parks Maintenance Tax went into effect, the City has added the maintenance of three community parks (Arroyo, Mace Ranch, and Walnut), four neighborhood parks (John Barovetto, Harvest, Market and Cannery Dog Park), the Arroyo pool complex and approximately 43 additional acres of greenbelts and open space.

The City currently maintains:

- 5 Community Parks, 89 Acres
- 28 Neighborhood Parks, 135 Acres
- 29 Greenbelts, 175 Acres
- Streetscapes, 83 Acres
- 14,556 Street Trees
- 8,964 Park & Greenbelt Trees

**Why is Measure H on the June 2018 Ballot for renewal?**

The Parks Maintenance Tax, renewed by voters in 2012, sunsets in June 2018. The City Council has placed Measure H on the ballot to ask residents to renew the Parks Maintenance Tax.

**What will happen if the Parks Maintenance Tax is not renewed?**

If the Parks Maintenance Tax is not renewed in 2018, the City will need to determine how to reduce services and costs in response to the loss of approximately \$1.4 million. Ultimately, the decision of service level reductions will be decided by the City Council.

***For more information, please visit: [CityofDavis.org](http://CityofDavis.org)***