

# **Friends of Peters Canyon**

## **Minutes of May 7, 2015 Meeting with OC Parks**

**In Attendance:** FPC – Bill Ahern, Bill and Barbara Annan,  
Mark Sweetman, Jane Rice

FCA – Rick Nelson

OC Parks – Scott Thomas, Director of  
Planning and Design

Bill Reiter, Operations Manager

### **1. Introductions**

We introduced the Friends of Peters Canyon to OC Parks, and explained that our organization is about restoring/preserving/conserving Peters Canyon so that it is sustainable for the long haul, and in also doing what we can to help the Park be a good neighbor to our surrounding communities.

We emphasized that we want to be an effective partner to OC Parks, and will do whatever we can to assist them in their efforts. A relationship's a two-way street, and we want to be a source for rapid-response feedback from the community as their work goes forward.

### **2. Key Issues in the General Development Plan**

#### **a. Keeping the lower reservoir trail open**

I've been mis-describing this issue. It's not a matter of closing the trail, but of changing the access point. The point is that OC Parks is planning to close off the unpaved service road and its current access gate, off of Peters Canyon,

right behind the El Dorado section of Tustin Ranch. The road would remain open for emergency vehicles, of course, but would just be closed off as a Park access point. This is actually necessary and beneficial as the homeowners in that area have properties that abut that service road. They are so close, in fact, that one homeowner ended up with a couple of bikes in her backyard when someone who was lifting them over the gate accidentally dropped them. And there's noise and general ruckus.

However, closing that access point will leave people who currently use it with no easy access to that desirable loop trail. And, unfortunately, this could result in even more traffic coming up behind Cameo Woods. So, Bill Ahern proposed a "third way" – moving the access point to the trail further up so that it still routes people away from the El Dorado homeowners but gives them another good entry point without having to trek past Cameo Woods. (The service road will stay where it is, for emergency vehicle access.) The devil is always in the details, but on paper this looked like an excellent approach.

**OC Parks has the action to develop this relocated entry point.**

**b. No more parking lots.**

As we explained, what we're really opposed to is more visitors, because the Park is maxed out at peak periods, and is clearly suffering from the visitor load. It's a special place, as many people have found out, and it's being loved to death.

There is a legitimate parking shortage, i.e. 130 spaces in the official lot for a visitor load, at peak periods of 800. Even if that number, optimally, should be lower – say 650 – 130 parking spaces doesn't cut it. However, we feel, strongly, that if we add more parking, more visitors will appear (if you build it, they will come) and so remain opposed to putting in new lots.

Parks assured us that they had really “heard the message” re no lot near the Southern entrance. (We were polite, but boiling oil and pitchforks were mentioned.) In the North, they may go ahead and grab the property that is now available (the unused field on Skylark), so that they will have it for the future, but not put it in service now. {See below for our current problems with parking and other regulatory enforcement.}

Bill Reiter explained that capacity control is a very difficult problem at Peters Canyon, because the Park's borders are so porous – it's so easy to enter as a pedestrian from many points. One of our group, Barbara Annan, made a pitch during Workshop #3, for Parks to help “smooth the load” of visitors by actively marketing the other park opportunities that exist. Parks has been very receptive to this. Santiago Oaks, for example, sometimes has room to spare, and parking available, when Peters Canyon is overflowing.

**OC Parks has the action to develop a directory and/or other promotional materials that can be displayed in self-help kiosks inside Peters Canyon (and our other parks too), making**

**visitors aware of the other opportunities available to them that may be less crowded and have more parking. Rangers could hand these out too, as a way of possibly re-directing visitors who can't find a place to park.**

**c. No paved off-road BikeWay inside the Park.**

Virtually everyone I know who has seen the diagrammatic plan of the paved Bikeway running from top to bottom of Peters Canyon has had the same reaction: Why on earth would we want to do that? And that includes reactions from a number of street bikers.

First, it would seem to us as Southern Californians that we have more than enough paving in our environment as it is. We really want – and need – for our Park to remain as natural a place as can be managed. And an off-road paved BikeWay is a pretty big deal, involving a paved surface from 8' to 14' wide, per the standards set up for BikeWay development, with 1 – 2' shoulders on either side, and that will necessarily involve more habitat destruction, right when Parks is trying to focus on restoration.

Second, this seems to be inviting accidents and potentially serious safety issues. There's really no way to keep pedestrian traffic off of the Bikeway if it were to go in, at minimum where the multi-use dirt trails intersect with the Bikeway, and there are quite a few of those intersections. Street bikes will move at speed – in fact a fairly large contingent of the street bikers who would be the primary users of this Bikeway segment . . . are work-week

commuters. And, again, you have to ask: Why are we doing this inside the Park?

The street bikers need, and deserve, a place to ride and the absence of a BikeWay in the Peters Canyon immediate area makes it difficult for street bikers to cobble together a connection between Northern Bikeway segments, and those that exist to the South. However, no one's opposed to a BikeWay – it's just where to route it that's under discussion.

Scott Thomas discussed with us alternative routing that is being considered along Jamboree, and we worked on that alternative together for a bit. (Note this would still be an off-road BikeWay, not a painted line on the street.) Mark Sweetman is a street bike rider, on occasion, and had a particularly valuable insight into what would make the alternative routing attractive and useful for a biker.

**OC Parks will continue their evaluation of alternative routing for the BikeWay.** May I just say – YEA!!!

FPC members please note that **OC Parks Workshop #4 is tentatively planned for July 15,** but that date could change.

### **3. Other issues discussed.**

#### **a. Enforcement of Park regulations.**

Mark discussed his ongoing problems with people, arriving at the Park well before the stated opening

time of 7:00 a.m. – sometimes as early at 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. – to park on Lower Lake immediately behind his property (immediately behind his bedroom as it turns out), slamming car doors, clicking their car alarms – chirp! chirp! -- sometimes making the noises associated with putting their bikes together – and cheerily and loudly greeting other visitors. This is driving Mark and his neighbors nuts. Plus, there's been a lot of property destruction on a median that people assume is Park property, but is actually private.

Bill Reiter said that this kind of problem is something they've had to deal with elsewhere too, and that if we work with him and ask him to, he can mount a sting operation to catch a bunch of the offenders, remind them of the rules, and issue tickets or whatever enforcement penalties are available. Obviously, like any enforcement, this is something that would have to be repeated a few times in order for people to get the message that we're serious about this, but once they do get the message there should be improvement.

Another thing we could look at is going back to the Department of Public Works and ask that parking be prohibited on that side of Lower Lake, where it is now allowed on one side only. When the original request was taken to DPW, it was just a fluke that parking ended up being allowed where it is. Mark said they checked the street address listings and concluded there were no addresses on that side of Lower Court so no one was living there and parking was okay. But there are

occupied homes along that stretch of road – the street addresses are just over on the next street.

**Mark, you have the actions. Please talk with your neighbors and then 1) ask Bill to set up a sting on some appropriate weekend, and see how many fish we catch. And 2), with your neighbors, think about whether you do want to make another pass at DPW to get parking restricted.**

If we elect to go back to DPW, FPC and FCA can help set that up. But it would be very helpful if you had the results of event-diary entries, documenting what's been happening, pictures if you can manage it – hey, you're awake anyway!!! – and results of Bill's sting operation, so we can make a documented case that the problem exists.

**b. Other enforcement issues**

Bill Reiter told us that the Orange County Sheriff's department *is* responsible for law enforcement activity in the Park (or the Orange PD or Tustin PD, depending on where you live.) The Park rangers can help with the enforcement of Park regulations, e.g. opening and closing hours, as an example, but law enforcement is the right call when laws are being broken, including public nuisance "drunk and disorderly" issues late at night, and parking violations. If a law enforcement agency refuses to respond when called, saying that it's an issue for the Rangers, let us know.

One action suggested by one of our members is to see if logs exist of the parking tickets that have been given, by date and street location – and how big the tickets are. There are ongoing, repeated violations, and whatever the tickets are for (in \$), they don't appear to have a deterrent effect.

**Jane will work through FCA and their liaison with the Sheriff to see what log information exists, and if there isn't one, to propose that it be kept so that we can document our problem.**

- c. Jane raised an issue another member had brought up re visitor traffic in Bent Tree Park. There, the issue raised was groups of family and friends coming to stay all day – or for several hours – at the park to have barbeques. While a barbeque or picnic certainly sounds like a reasonable thing to want to do in a park, Bent Tree is a little neighborhood park . . . with no restrooms or built-in barbeque equipment. There's a concern that the portable grills people bring in for these functions could represent a fire hazard. Note that if someone plans a large function, they need a permit to bring in porta-potties or bouncy houses, and dogs in the park are always supposed to be on leash. If residents think there are violations going on, they should report these to the Irvine or Peters Canyon Ranger.

**Bill Reiter said they would look at whether portable barbeques should be banned because of the fire safety concern (they are allowed now).**



**4. Are other parks coming on-line that will relieve the pressure on Peters Canyon?**

I think the answer to this is mixed. Yes, the Irvine Company has donated additional land around Irvine Lake, and some access days are now open in the new park lands. The Irvine Ranch Conservancy is managing the access days. And Black Starr is now open. Also, Parks has acquired Hicks Haul Road (which was a trucking road, as the name implies) and that could be turned into a BikeWay.

So, yes more park lands are being opened, and eventually this may give us a little relief. How much, and how soon, are pretty much “wait and see”.

**Note from Jane: Don't forget to include the new lands in your promotional materials!**

- 5. OC Parks posted their alternative drawings, from Workshop #3 on their website. You can view them, at [http://ocparks.com/parks/peters/general\\_development\\_plan](http://ocparks.com/parks/peters/general_development_plan).**