

Griffith Park Advisory Board Special Meeting

February 6, 2025 at 6:30pm

Final Minutes

1. Call to order

Chair Crow called meeting to order at 6:33 pm

Present: Crow, Carlson, Chung, Greenwald, Griffin, Gustincic, Hagans, Laib, Phillips

Excused:

Absent:

2. Board Announcements

None

3. Approval of Minutes

Motion: Greenwald motion to approve minutes, Phillips second. Approved.

4. Public Comment

- None

5. Information Reports and Presentations

Mehmet Berker, CD4

- Council District 4, in collaboration with Council District 5, put forward a motion to understand the current inventory and future needs of various public and private entities around emergency management and response, potential new policies and protocols, and resource needs. There is also a proposed motion from council District 11 to automatically close all parks, including Griffith Park, in the event of a Red Flag Warning.
- Crow – To clarify, are you reaching out to organizations to understand their response during red flag warnings?
- Berker - More like, asking them what we should do in these red flag events and what they need.
- Phillips – But you're not precluding the CD11 motion?
- Berker - No, they are going at the same time, so they may even be consolidated.
- Laib – I'm concerned about all these Red Flag days and PDS' and who makes the decision on when the park is closed.

- Fire Chief Ramirez – red flag warnings are all or nothing for the City of LA, we don't have the ability to select different areas. There is a rating system for red flags, going all the way up to critical which is determined by the fire department, specifically, the Valley Bureau. Most of the time, in response to Red Flag situations, we pre-deploy additional resources.

Paul Liu, LADWP

- When I started at LADWP, I was working on improving the water system in the park. Eventually, through an MOU, LADWP actually took over operation of the entire park water system. Since that time, we've added pipeline, fire hydrants, and helipads. In addition, we have multiple reservoirs nearby that are available for water should an air response be needed. Finally, the Headworks Reservoir pumps water directly into the park, and this reservoir has substantial capacity. Over the next 5-15 years, we are focused on adding/rehabbing tanks, pump stations, and pipelines. Also, through a mutual aid partnership, representatives from PG&E came down and put fire retardant on the utility lines. We also have a recycled water system hooked up to hydrants, non-potable water.
- Crow – It sounds like there is an abundance of water in the park to fight fires. After additional work, would you say the park is optimized for fire prevention?
- Liu - Each hydrant is designed to flow 1,000 gallons per minute, some are 3,000 gallons per minute. Our infrastructure is as good as it's ever been. The tools are there.
- Laib – Do you put the pipelines underground?
- Liu - Some of the pipes have been underground but there has been a need to put them above ground at times.
- Phillips – The infrastructure seems concentrated in certain areas of the Park.
- Liu - We try to put our pipes along the areas that the fire dept can access.
- Hagans – I've noticed there are metal plates on trails, can they be skid proof for horses?
- Liu - We will look into that.
- Greenwald – What are the plans for the Fern Dell area, will infrastructure be added in that area?
- Liu – I will have to get back to you.
- Laib – And what about the higher elevation areas?
- Liu - I will get back to you.

Discussion and Public Comment

- For comparison, how many gallons of water were used in the Palisades fire?

- Liu – I don't know exactly. And water use during a fire really depends on a number of factors
- Some of the hydrants in the Lake Hollywood area are no longer painted red. And how often do you test them?
- Chief Ramirez – We test every hydrant every year.
- Liu – Let us know if there are any that need maintenance.
- Berker - Call CD4 if you need DOT to repaint curbs. If you see a hydrant buried in dirt, call us and retaining walls can be added.
- Phillips – Are the water resources in the park fungible?
- Liu – The short answer is yes.
- Phillips – If you are fighting a fire in one part of a park, will other parts be at risk?
- Chief Ramirez – A municipal water system is just finite. The pipes are not designed for high-pressure water flow and fighting fires like the ones we experienced recently.
- Has the fire system near Lake Hollywood and upward been evaluated?
- Liu - We will have to get back to you.
- Do the sprinklers in the park water areas when in drought?
- Jorge – We usually use irrigation to just get vegetation established.
- Laib - Is there protocol to turn the sprinklers on during red flag days?
- Jorge – No, we tend to not do it.
- Superintendent Smith – we can turn them on remotely though.
- Berker – We should put a pin in that until we hear back from the various agencies.
- Liu – We do look to other regions and cities for best practices.
- What is your turnaround time on maintenance for hydrants?
- Liu - We will have to get back to you. You can contact Michael.
- Laib – It seems to me that there are so many entities involved in fire prevention. Is there any discussion about centralizing decision making during emergencies?
- Berker – We will see about the outcomes for the motion.
- Phillips – How many Red Flag days do we have in a year?
- Chief Ramirez – It varies by year.
- Phillips - Is it 50?
- Chief Ramirez - Probably not. Maybe ten 3-day events
- Carlson – Can we talk about the sources of fire? Based on the two fires we just experienced, it seems like the causes were utility lines and possibly arson. Can

we start with arson? Has there been any arson activity and what is being done to prevent it?

- LAPD – There has been some activity, but we caught the people and the fire department was able to extinguish the fire. I was called to the Palisades the day of that fire and it was like nothing I've ever seen. It was a tornado of fire. With situations like that, fires cannot be put out. But most of the time we can put the fire out before it spreads.
- Ranger Gary – It's important to remember that not all human-source fires are from arson, sometimes it's accidental with fires for heat from unhoused individuals. People can find a way into the park. Even with the recent arson fire, we took all procedures, closed the park, staffed the entries, locked the gates, but the fire still started.
- Greenwald - You're raising an interesting point about the concept of closing the park. The relative utility of a closure. Is closure by itself enough?
- Chief Ramirez – The short answer is yes, but some folks don't know its closed or don't listen.
- Gustincic – I was very disappointed to see how people responded to recent park closures. Maybe there is a way to better inform people.
- Superintendent Smith – If you want a successful closing you need to staff every gate
- Phillips – When thinking about what is important on red flag days, what is the most important? Is park closure the most important?
- Chief Ramirez – I'm in public safety, once you remove the public, I don't have a problem. From a public safety perspective, park closures are helpful.
- Ranger Gary – Plus, closures allow access and fewer calls.
- Chung – Has the threshold for park closures changed?
- Superintendent Smith – We have only had to close the park several times due to emergencies.
- Crow – Perhaps Jorge can say more about brush clearance.
- Jorge – We do once a year brush clearance. We focus first on structures, then roads, creating a large buffer on each.
- I work at the observatory. You did a fantastic job clearing brush recently. And Gary and the Rangers are spread thin and do a great job, but we're here to help the rangers. We will tell people to put out cigarettes. We're here to serve you and make the park safe.
- Tracy James – What is the role of DOT in closing off artery streets? We could not get DOT when we needed them in the 2007 fire. And streets need to be shut down during fires.
- I am a CERT trained volunteer and I helped in the convergent response at the LA

equestrian center. Perhaps we can pre-deploy and evacuate early for the pedestrian streets.

- I was also at the equestrian center during the fires. And I am very grateful to those that helped rescue horses and small animals.
- Gerry – Fires tend to start along roads and perhaps we should consider closing roads first. We should also talk about the amount of fuel in the park. We have no budget for removal of invasive species.
- Perhaps with more resources we could be more proactive in removing brush and dead trees. A bigger budget would help the forestry department be more proactive.
- Wondering how many people know you cannot park along the streets during red flag events. I would like to see the plan to reduce traffic on the narrow streets on the westside of the park. Perhaps there could be better signage about red flag events.
- Regarding closures, some people use the park to commute to work. Please think about us during park closures because the river as an alternative can be scary.
- I really think we should do more about fuel management. We should take care of this park, which is a forest.
- Berker – Has there been a forestry plan established before for fire prevention?
- Superintendent Smith – The forestry department is spread very thin and do try to clear fuel but can't get to everything.
- Chef Ramirez – In terms of fuel management, controlled burns are the best strategy but there is risk involved.
- Tracy – Also perhaps we can discuss with Caltrans advertising the red flag warnings.
- I'm in Burbank and we were a small spot of relative safety, but we always look to Griffith Park, and it was a huge relief to hear about the park closures.
- Berker – There isn't much of a rush, but it would be great to get feedback on what may be helpful in fire prevention for GP. We would like all considerations. Should the zoo be left open or is that too complicated? What about commuting, can people just use the major commuting routes? What about the employees? Can they be paid during park closures? We want to hear all considerations and hear about resources needed.
- Greenwald – I'm going to offer a framework to consider as a path forward. We could make a decision to strongly support the CD4 motion because it lays out a thoughtful approach to collect all information. As an additional path, perhaps we can form an ad hoc to review all materials and resources and report back. Third option would be as a board make a motion to say it would be premature to close the park on all red flag days.
- Laib – I think it's important to strongly support the actions of CD4 and CD5. And I

think we could come up with a list of good ideas in an ad hoc by our next meeting in three weeks. I think the first thing is supporting CD4 and CD5 in their efforts.

- Gustincic – and I don't think this board has to solve all the issues, instead just lay out the issues to consider.
- Phillips – I would like to see if we as a board are comfortable supporting CD4. And then decide if we want to form an ad hoc. And then express disagreement on universal park closures.
- Greenwald – I think the nuance is that we're not taking action against the park closure motion, but it's premature to decide.

- Motion: Phillips moves that the Board write a letter to support the actions of CD4 and CD5. Laib second. Unanimous. Greenwald to write the letter.

- Chair Action: Crow creates an ad hoc committee to address fire safety issues specific to Griffith Park and deliver a status report in three weeks. Ad hoc committee members – Greenwald, Chung, Hagans.

- Motion: Laib moves that the Board write a letter declaring that as the Griffith Park Advisory Board, we cannot support the motion from CD11 to apply a blanket closure to Griffith Park on red flag days without further consideration. Phillips second. Unanimous. Gustincic to write the letter.

6. Superintendent Updates

None.

7. Committee and Ad Hoc Reports

Vice-chair Crow: The Executive Committee met and discussed agenda for the meeting that was cancelled earlier in January.

8. Board Business

None

9. Adjournment

Motion: Carlson moves to adjourn. Griffin second. Unanimous at 8:55pm. Next meeting Thursday, February 27, 2024.