



Friends of Campus Park

A Concept Plan



For Future Development of
Botanical Gardens and Related
Spaces at Oxnard Campus Park



PART ONE

Introduction and Background

1. Who are the Friends of Campus Park?

A grass roots collective of Oxnard residents and supporters have been advocating for botanical garden uses at Campus Park since 2011. In 2013, those efforts resulted in the City Council turning down a more active, sports complex like development in favor of adopting a stance that Campus Park must include spaces for a more quiet and passive use in the form of botanical gardens and other more relaxed, natural types of settings.

In 2019, The Friends of Campus Park (FOCP) was formed by a core group of these local advocates, initially under the umbrella of the non-profit Oxnard Heritage Foundation. In 2021, the FOCP expects to transition into its own non-profit, 501c3 status, with a governing board with a mandate to continue its outreach and share their knowledge and expertise. The mission of the FOCP is “to improve the quality of life of Oxnard’s diverse community by providing enjoyable and inspiring places through connections with people, nature, and by creating educational opportunities and environmental awareness”.

2. What is the History of Campus Park?

The 33 acre site of Campus Park was the longtime location of Oxnard High School. The school relocated to a new campus elsewhere in Oxnard in 1995. The City of Oxnard subsequently acquired this site with the intention of someday transforming it into park space and other public serving uses. Currently, only the main gymnasium building, a two-story classroom building, and some recreational paved areas remain. The rest of the campus was demolished, leaving only fallow open fields and a few select trees.

In 2016, a portion of the site, located in the south east corner, was formally improved as a fenced-in dog park, after years of informal use by dog owners. The balance of the open fields are closed to the public.





3. What is the status of Campus Park today?

In February of 2020, the State of California, under the Prop. 68 Parks Grant Program, awarded the City of Oxnard \$8.5 million to renovate the site into an operating public park. During the prior year, as part of the application process, six community workshops were held to solicit the public's input on what amenities and activities could be featured in the park if the city were to be successful in winning a grant. The resulting Phase 1 "wish list" of items include:

- Children's playground
- Skate park
- Community garden
- Public art
- Additionally, there will be storm water improvements and renovated parking.
- Performing arts amphitheater / multi-use pavilion
- Multi-use field / meadow
- Renovated basketball courts
- Lighting and landscaping
- Bicycle pump track
- Pelota Mixteca court
- Walking trails
- New seasonal/periodic creek

These features will not fully "flesh out" all of the available Campus Park acreage. There will still be areas for future development. This is where the Friends of Campus Park see their most valuable ongoing involvement.

One other aspect that will impact the overall design and planning of the park is that the site will also be a location where recycled water from the city's wastewater reclamation facility is pumped into our underground aquifers. This will be accomplished by several injection and monitoring wells, scattered in different locations. The largest of these consist of pumps that will need to be housed in permanent shelters to mask the noise they produce. The shelters will require access paths to allow for maintenance vehicles, and the structures themselves will be "openable" to allow for crane access from above in order to swap out parts of the equipment when necessary.

The challenge will be to seamlessly blend these structures into the park, and hopefully even find creative ways to incorporate them into some of the other public serving features of the park. Can the maintenance access roads also be part of the walking trails system? Can the shelter structures serve double duty as educational opportunities to teach about water reclamation and the natural processes that occur in our aquifers? Can these structures even be augmented to accommodate other park serving needs such as equipment storage, or even greenhouses? Can a creative water feature such as a lake or stream be a side benefit of the water reclamation functions happening here?

Additionally, other community-based organizations, such as the Police Activities League (PAL) have and will continue to enjoy a presence at Campus Park, notably through the use of the existing gym building and other features clustered closer to the western edge of the property.

The Friends of Campus Park are eager to play a role in the planning for these initial Phase 1 renovations and the other identified uses of the site as they advocate for future implementation of the botanical gardens and more nature based aspects that can be implemented in a self-sustaining, community based public / private arrangement.



4. What is the Friends of Campus Park’s Involvement to date?

A proposed generic design for Campus Park, comprised primarily of sports fields, was ready for implementation in 2013 when community opposition convinced the City Council that many other users would not be adequately served if the acreage were to be devoted solely to youth and recreation league athletics. Other parks in Oxnard, notably College park, and the proposed future Sports Park, served these functions. What was lacking was a park that would provide opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of nature, educational opportunities, programming and other community enrichments.

This was the highest profile involvement to date by the people who would eventually become the Friends of Campus Park, but their efforts started two years earlier. What resulted was an early schematic plan for a botanical gardens type of park that would become the inspiration for future advocacy. Their public outreach took the form of a website, Facebook page, engagement at local events and festivals, neighborhood meetings and fundraising activities.



In 2019, the Friends of Campus Park played a significant role in assisting the city in organizing, publicizing, and conducting the six community workshops that were held for the Prop. 68 grant application. The FOCPP involvement included designing and posting large banners, designing and distribution of flyers at downtown restaurants and cafés, posting specially produced videos and other information on social media, gathering sponsorship support from local businesses, providing volunteers to assist in publicizing and facilitating the workshops, including helping with interpretation assistance in Spanish and Indigenous languages.

In August of 2020, the FOCPP participated in a kick-off meeting with the City Manager, Public Works Director, City Engineer and other city staff members. In that meeting, the FOCPP made a presentation describing their proposal for a future public / private partnership for the ongoing development and maintenance of the botanical gardens and certain other parts of Campus Park. During that meeting, the City Manager suggested that the FOCPP could also play a role in the evaluation of landscape architecture firms that had applied to provide design and engineering services for the Phase 1 implementation.



In September of 2020, two representatives of the FOCPP joined three city staff members for the virtual interviews of the three short-listed design firms being evaluated to provide the aforementioned Phase 1 services. After the three interviews, the interview team held a subsequent virtual discussion and evaluation meeting. The team felt that MIG, Inc. be the preferred firm to be recommended for selection and negotiation, leading to that firm’s being awarded the contract to move forward with the Phase 1 work.

The Friends of Campus Park look forward to working with MIG, Inc. and continuing involvement with city staff to help set forth a pathway to the eventual botanical gardens and other public serving future amenities at Campus Park.



5. What are the Future Goals of the Friends of Campus Park?

The Friends of Campus Park are finalizing their efforts to transition into a non-profit, 501c3 organization. This will entail forming a Governing Board, and adopting a business plan that establishes a mechanism to enter into a public / private partnership with the City of Oxnard for the future creation and self-sustaining operation of portions of Campus Park.

The FOCP advocates for the creation of a botanical gardens type of development for Campus Park, featuring spaces and experiences that are more natural in design and appearance. Wherever possible, the overall design of the park should emphasize traditional, natural features and motifs, rather than standard, utilitarian, “municipal works” types of stylings.

These portions of Campus Park should provide ample opportunity for community organizations, young people, schools, church groups, and individual residents to “take ownership” of parts of the park through volunteer efforts focused on fund raising, development, and ongoing care and maintenance of these amenities.

Other, more “active” spaces should cater to events, festivals, and gatherings, and should be designed to accommodate multiple uses. Also, the educational aspects and opportunities at Campus Park should have a heavy emphasis in every part of the current and future development.

The Friends of Campus Park intend to be an active and welcome participant in the Phase 1 planning of Campus Park, as well as the future development of the remaining spaces. FOCP is positioning themselves to be the officially adopted, non-profit organization that takes the lead in developing and maintaining the “gardens” oriented spaces at the park. FOCP will operate hand in hand with other groups that have a stake in Campus Park, such as PAL, and of course, the City of Oxnard to ensure that the all parts of the park coexist in an intelligently and creatively planned arrangement. The FOCP’s role is modeled after the public / private partnership that the city of Ventura utilizes with the non-profit organization that operates the Ventura Botanical Gardens.

The goal is to have a park that all residents of Oxnard can be proud of, can enjoy aspects of, and can be inspired by.





6. Why is this important?

Oxnard is proud to have been awarded one of the coveted Prop. 68 grants. The funds will pay for a wonderful Phase 1 development, but there will still be so much to do in future phases.

Of course, immediate funding is not available to develop the “rest” of Campus Park. Nor is it likely to be any time in the near future using traditional funding arrangements.

The Friends of Campus Park propose a partnership that will result in organic, community based, self-funded and self-sustaining development over time.

Residents will welcome the opportunity to take a more active, direct role in the development and stewardship of these portions of Campus Park going forward.

What is needed now is that the Phase 1 planning provide for well thought out arrangements of spaces and uses and include future areas for infill improvement and development.



PART TWO

Concepts for Future Development

Oxnard's diverse community deserves a wide variety of park spaces and activities. The type of user that does not readily gravitate to sports related activities has traditionally been underserved. Campus Park, while still featuring amenities geared towards younger and/or more active users, provides an opportunity to bring to Oxnard some park settings and opportunities that do not currently exist here.

The initial build-out, known as Phase 1, funded by the \$8.5 million Prop. 68 grant, will indeed provide a few new aspects geared towards more passive use and enjoyment. These include:

- A new community garden
- New trails
- A new multi-use field or meadow
- A new seasonal/periodic creek
- Public art

Additionally, two more facilities will be created that cater to non-sports types of uses:

- A new nature themed inclusive playground
- A new multi-use pavilion/amphitheater

All of this represents a great beginning in the activation of Campus Park! The major intent of the Friends of Campus Park is to help shepherd in what happens after the Phase 1 build-out is complete.

CONCEPT: A Public/Private Partnership for a Botanical Garden

Modeled after the successful arrangement under which the very popular Ventura Botanical Gardens is operated, the non-profit Friends of Campus Park (FOCP) propose to partner with the City of Oxnard to self-fund, maintain and program a Botanical Gardens on the site.

For the purpose of distinguishing this from the other parts of Campus Park that are fully operated and maintained by the city with its own personnel and budget, the botanical gardens might be officially designated as "The Gardens at Campus Park", or just "The Gardens", for short.

The Gardens clearly won't be fully realized all at once. The FOCP intends their development to happen in small phases, over time, as funding is generated and a work force for development and ongoing maintenance is established.

For now, the most crucial thing is that the planning for any and all parts of Campus Park be coordinated so that the features and functions that are important to all user groups effectively co-exist in a well thought out manner. For example, any naturally landscaped and appointed spaces designed for quiet contemplation should not be located right next to the skate park, bicycle pump track, or Pelota Mixteca.

Overall Design Philosophy:

All parts of The Gardens should be influenced by nature, with hardscapes and other permanent, non-living features constructed with "natural" materials. Examples could be stone walls or wooden fences vs. concrete block or chain link. Traditional designs for signage, structures, fixtures and furnishings, placing emphasis on the use of wood, iron and stone, should be favored over more "modern" or "contemporary" equivalents.



Nature Trail



Arboretum



Greenhouse

Wherever possible, these concepts should be adhered to throughout all of Campus Park, even the parts that are not operated by the FOCP. This would provide a very cohesive appearance to such things as major identifying signs, wayfinding signage, drinking fountains, exercise stations, restroom facilities, pathways and trails, fencing and gates, pedestals that support light fixtures, landscape treatments and highlights, etc.

Proposed Garden Spaces or Features include:

- **Landscaped “Regions”**

The Gardens would consist of a series of smaller plots or landscaped experiences that flow from one to the next. Each of these would feature its own theme in terms of plant selections and physical design.

- **Nature Trail**

All of the individual parts of The Gardens would be tied together by a natural feeling, meandering trail. Sometimes, the trail would feature offshoots that provide for unexpected or surprise elements, such as secluded, quiet seating areas, or a small water feature, or the like. All along the way, signage should be present to identify the species of plants and trees that are on display. The nature trail is integrated with and transitions into the overall trails and pathway system that is established throughout Campus Park. All trails should be constructed with decomposed granite, rather than asphalt or concrete paving.

- **Outdoor Workshop Space**

One of the first things to be implemented should be a space that allows for the development of and engagement in partnership opportunities, provides for a greater connection and involvement with the community, and fosters the educational goals of the FOCP. Parts and features would include shade-structure covered worktables, an outdoor kitchen including a clay oven, a small greenhouse, and storage sheds or lockers for tools, equipment and supplies. This space might even be located near the PAL facilities to make them easily available to that group for integration into their programs.

- **Arboretum**

Due to existing height limitations imposed by the landing flight path approach to Oxnard Airport, taller developments are restricted to a narrow strip alongside 5th Street, which is the southern edge of Campus Park. While it is hoped that trees and other structures of a lesser height can be located anywhere throughout the park, the tallest trees and structures must be clustered along this southern edge. FOCP envisions that visitors to the proposed main entrance off of 5th Street be greeted by a literal forest of larger trees, which would comprise one or more of the regions of the botanical gardens, served by the nature trail.

- **Greenhouse**

Separate from the smaller instructional greenhouse that is part of the Outdoor Workshop Space, there could be a larger, botanically oriented, exhibit greenhouse that would likely have to be located in the non-height restriction zone alongside 5th Street. A small entrance fee or donations may be solicited to help with the costs to maintain this facility.

- **Specifically Oriented Garden Spaces**

- The Community Garden that is part of Phase 1 could be operated on a volunteer basis by the FOCP. Located close to the Outdoor Work Area, it could emphasize concepts such as sustainable farming, new farming technologies, environmental sustainability and science, and nutritional health, healthy cooking and other culinary arts.

- Specific floral groupings or gardens such as a Rose Garden, Tulip Garden, Native Plants Garden, etc. can be placed in thoughtful locations. For example, a rose garden located near the intersection of 3rd and H streets could serve as a romantic photo location for newlyweds coming from nearby Santa Clara Church.
- Given that the Oxnard Buddhist Temple is across H Street from Campus Park's north east corner, a natural opportunity exists to have a Japanese inspired garden right there in that location. FOCP has already reached out to members of the Temple, who have expressed interest in taking the lead on the design, development and use of such a park if it were to be fully realized.
- A Chumash Sacred Garden would provide a spot for the celebration of the native peoples of this part of what is now California, and their knowledge and use of native plants, sustainable living, and culture.
- Augmenting the Nature Themed Inclusive Playground that will be a part of the Phase 1 development, a Children's Natural Garden would provide learning opportunities on topics such as natural science, horticulture, ecology, the environment, water based eco-systems, and the like.



Landscaped "Regions"

• Park Perimeter

Attractive fencing should surround the park, with controlled access at key locations all around. Hours of operation could run until dusk except when specially organized and supervised events take place. Natural privacy walls comprised of shrubs and hedges would serve to focus visitors' thoughts inward while helping to reduce the traffic noise of 5th Street, for example. An earthen berm, similar to the ones at Collection Park in the retail development in northern Oxnard, would also help to mask outside noise, while providing opportunities for pathways to have elevation changes. If situated adjacent to the Phase 1 amphitheater, this grass covered berm could also serve as a seating and viewing location.

• Dog Park

The FOCP advocates that the existing dog park at the south east corner remain, or at most, be relocated if that location better lends itself to other uses. Wherever the dog park is, it should be improved with better landscaping around its perimeter, some trees, and it would be made even more attractive by an adjacency to one of The Gardens' beautiful naturalized locations.

It should be noted that many of the above described features and activities are listed as desired amenities in general, and for Campus Park in particular, in the Oxnard Parks Master Plan, which is nearing its final adoption by the City Council.



Park Perimeter

CONCEPT: Educational Opportunities

Every aspect of The Gardens at Campus Park should be looked at as an educational opportunity. Certainly, some parts are planned with education and learning as a primary focus, and those include the aforementioned:

- Outdoor Workspace and Greenhouse
- Community Garden
- Children's Natural Garden



Santa Clara Church



But educational value can also be provided throughout The Gardens, and that will be accomplished in ways that include:

- Illustrative signage explaining every distinct garden or section
- Identifying and descriptive markers at every unique tree and plant
- Information (story telling) kiosks in select locations that further describe and illustrate aspects of the park
- An information booth, or window, perhaps integrated into a proposed gift shop structure at the formal Front Entrance of the park
- Organized tours, including group tours, especially in the forms of field trips by classes from local schools
- A special display covering the history of Oxnard High School, and going back even further, Oxnard Union High School, that occupied this site in generations past

Subjects of specific focus for the educational aspects of The Gardens would include:

- Agriculture, food processing and packaging, and sustainable farming
- Inspiring visitors to start or improve their own personal landscapes at home, or even grow their own vegetables
- Providing spaces for quiet contemplation and uplifting of spirits
- Learning about climate change, why it happens, and how it might be countered
- Learning about the important role that parks play in the well being of our communities

Additionally, the FOCP suggests a future opportunity exists where Campus Park could be part of a “cultural trail”, connected to other notable, nearby points of interest through enhanced walkways and bike paths with coordinated signage, landscaping, lighting, art, and informational booths and displays. These other locations in the cultural trail include the Oxnard Performing Arts Center (OPAC), the Henry T. Oxnard Historic District of landmark homes, Oxnard Heritage Square (a collection



of historic farm houses that were relocated and restored in a spectacularly landscaped setting), the downtown Oxnard Transit Center, the downtown Plaza Park and its landmark Pagoda, the Carnegie Museum, and numerous downtown business and restaurants.



CONCEPT: Revenue Generating Features and Spaces

Campus Park can also provide facilities and amenities for numerous types of gatherings and events. Due to the airport flight path height limitations, and restrictions on large gatherings, most of these features will likely be clustered along the 5th street edge outside of the limitation boundary, and to some degree, on a strip along H Street at the eastern edge.

• **Main (or formal) Garden Entrance**

Although there will be several other gated entrances around all sides of Campus Park, the FOCIP recommends that the main garden entrance be situated along 5th Street. This will place it in proximity with, and provide circulation to, the other amenities that are clustered in this area such as the Botanical Greenhouse, Outdoor Performance Space, Private Events Space, Welcome Center / Gift Shop, and a Garden Café. The Main Entrance would also lead directly to the beginning of the Nature Trail and entrance to the Arboretum.

• **Welcome Center / Gift Shop**

Staffed by Volunteers, the Welcome Center and Gift Shop would be a place for visitors to obtain information about Campus Park and The Gardens, embark on tours, organize school field trip visitations, and sign up for events and classes. The Gift Shop could sell on-site cultivated plants, gardening equipment and supplies, seeds, books, and other merchandise. The functions of an Information Booth, such as handing out maps and pamphlets, disseminating information, selling tickets, etc. could be handled from a dedicated window in this facility, if not a separate freestanding structure.

• **Donor’s Plaza**

Will provide an opportunity to have an attractive, outdoor social gathering place enhanced with things like trellises, water features, seating areas, bridges, artwork, sculptures, statues, trees and other structures that can be donated in later phases throughout the years. The theme will be up for discussion, but it should inspire and bring people together from all walks of life. This area can be designed with more hardscapes, ample lighting, symmetrical landscaping, name placing (plaques) opportunities on brick pathways, benches, fountains, trees, memorial spaces, art, etc. It can have, for example, permanent interactive areas where people can play chess/checkers, hop-scotch, ping-pong, sand games.



Garden Entrance



Garden Entrance



• **Outdoor Performance Space**

Most likely, one and the same as the Multi-use Performance Space / Amphitheater that is already being planned for in the Phase 1 development. That will likely be located on the 5th Street edge. But that is not to say that other spots couldn't lend themselves for smaller performances and gatherings in areas such as patios, courtyards and plazas. There could eventually even be a nature themed stage area with smaller capacity, intimate seating somewhere in The Gardens, tucked away in and under the tree canopy.



• **Private Event Space**

Similarly, a space or spaces that can be access-controlled should be available for a fee for weddings, receptions, club gatherings, etc. The largest of these should be situated on the 5th Street edge and have a capacity of up to 300 people. This space may be shared dual-purpose with the Performance Space, but ultimately, it would be preferable for the Events Space to be its own, large, open area for flexibility in use.



• **The Garden Café**

The Garden Café may, at first, take the form of a simple coffee cart. Eventually, it can expand to be a fully realized, stand alone facility. It can be operated on a concession basis, or through a partnership with a local coffee establishment, and even partially staffed by park volunteers or students via summer internships.

• **SPECIAL CLASSES**

Some of these activities could be booked via a nominal fee. Fee taking and scheduling can be accomplished by the volunteers at the Welcome Center and/or Information Booth or Window.





PART THREE

FOCP Business Plan and a Proposal for a Public / Private Partnership

As stated in the Introduction to this document, the Friends of Campus Park are in the process of becoming an independent, 501c3 non-profit organization. FOCP will be governed by a Board of Directors, and be a partner to the City for activating and operating The Gardens at Campus Park.

As stated, the **MISSION** of the FOCP is:

“To improve the quality of life of Oxnard’s diverse community by providing enjoyable and inspiring places through connections with people, nature, and by creating educational opportunities and environmental awareness”.

The long range **VISION** of the FOCP that will implement their Mission is:

“To become Oxnard’s centralized location for environmental knowledge, learning, spiritual enlightenment, and mental, physical and social wellness of the mind and body. To provide a creative space that attracts people from all ages and walks of life, empowering and inspiring through its programming, events and gardens”.

The FOCP Statement of **PURPOSE**, i.e. ways that the Vision will be realized, includes:

- Providing visitors a high quality experience
- Encouraging volunteerism and civic duty
- Providing a central location to gather for education, knowledge and enlightenment
- Partnering with higher learning institutions for the activation and use of the botanic spaces

- Partnering with other non-profits for shared, synergistic programming
- Partnering with relevant corporations for securing sponsorships for park spaces
- Providing educational resources for local schools
- Providing a safe, inspiring and creative environment

The overriding **VALUES** of the FOCP, under which all of it is established, are that:

- FOCP focuses on quality, education and sustainability
- FOCP values partnerships
- FOCP believes in uplifting local youth through encouragement, outreach and discipline
- FOCP understands the importance of educating the public about environmental health, and taking ownership and responsibility for their city.

And again, it is stressed that the FOCP recognizes that Campus Park presents different opportunities to different groups and entities that desire to claim parts of the property. The FOCP is eager to work closely with all stake holders in the ongoing effort to develop the site.

The FOCP partnership with the City of Oxnard proposes a way to gradually self-fund and operate significant parts of the park.



Under the direction of the Governing Board, an Executive Director will manage various functions of the organization. Other, potentially volunteer based functions may include:

- Volunteer Coordinators
- Horticultural Supervisors
- Gardeners
- Events and Guest Coordinator
- Welcome Center, Info Booth and Gift Shop staff
- Park Docents
- Park Ranger

PRIVATE REVENUE STREAMS could include:

- Sponsorships, grants and endowments
- Fundraisers
- Donor Areas (benches, plaques, fountains, trees, buildings, memorial pavers, etc.
- Gift Shop sales
- Café sales
- Festivals
- Wedding and event rentals
- Farmers markets
- Workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Community classes
- Outdoor Performance Space rentals
- Master Class donations

VOLUNTEERISM, above all, will be The Gardens' most valuable resource.

Following the lead of the successful public / private partnership that operates the Ventura Botanical Gardens, the Friends of Campus Park are eager to step in and establish a strong, ongoing relationship with the City of Oxnard for the successful future realization of The Gardens at Campus Park.