

1 The City Council of the City of Seabrook met in special session on Tuesday, January 7, 2020 at
2 6:00 p.m. in Seabrook City Hall, 1700 First Street, Seabrook, Texas to discuss, consider and if
3 appropriate, take action on the items listed below.
4

5 THOSE PRESENT WERE:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| 6 THOM KOLUPSKI | MAYOR |
| 7 ED KLEIN | COUNCIL PLACE NO. 1 |
| 8 LAURA DAVIS | COUNCIL PLACE NO. 2 |
| 9 JEFF LARSON | COUNCIL PLACE NO. 3 |
| 10 NATALIE PICHA | MAYOR PRO TEM |
| 11 | COUNCIL PLACE NO. 4 |
| 12 BUDDY HAMMANN – Ex. Abs. | COUNCIL PLACE NO. 5 |
| 13 JOE MACHOL | COUNCIL PLACE NO. 6 |
| 14 GAYLE COOK | CITY MANAGER |
| 15 SEAN LANDIS | DEPUTY CITY MANAGER |
| 16 STEVE WEATHERED | CITY ATTORNEY |
| 17 ROBIN LENIO | CITY SECRETARY |

18
19 Mayor Kolupski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
20

21 **1. PRESENTATION**

22
23 **1.1** Presentation of Certificates of Appreciation to the Carothers Coastal Gardens Task Force
24 members. *Thom Kolupski, Mayor*
25

26 Mayor Kolupsk presented Certificates of Appreciation for the time and effort the members
27 of the Carothers Coastal Gardens put in on this Task Force. Mayor Kolupski stated that the Council
28 and the City appreciates all of the task force members’ time and effort.
29

30 **2. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS - none**
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32 **3. WORKSHOP**
33

34 **3.1** Receive presentation, discuss, and if appropriate take action on the Carothers Coastal
35 Gardens Task Force Executive Summary. *David Popken, Chair of Carothers Coastal Gardens*
36 *Task Force*
37

38 David Popken, Chair of the Carothers Coastal Gardens Task Force, introduced each of the
39 task force members and thanked Council and City staff for allowing the task force to meet and
40 make recommendations.
41

42 Mr. Popken discussed all recommendations of the Task Force, as seen in Attachment A.
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46 **3.2** Discuss and if appropriate take action on the next steps regarding utilization of Carothers
47 Coastal Gardens facility. *City Council*

48
49 Mayor Koulupski stated that the majority of the survey sent out by the consultant on the
50 Parks and Trails Master Plan update indicates that many residents still do not know where
51 Carothers is or have even heard of Carothers, and it has been part of our park system, so to speak,
52 for many years. A resident can rent it, but can't use it, which is one of the biggest problems.
53 Residents are paying for the bond issued to purchase the property, but are not able to use the
54 facility. This information is critical to our decisions going forward. The recommendation by the
55 Task Force to use the Carothers house like the Community House is used is comparing apples to
56 oranges. The Community House is not a park, and the comparison is unfair. Mr. Popken explained
57 that the recommendation is to use the house as a rental until more long term plans for the house
58 can be put into place. The Community House has served the residents well. The previous iteration
59 for the use of the house: special events, weddings, classes, meetings, was not working. The house
60 will be accessible to everyone by allow the same rules as the Community House. Users would
61 pick up a key and inspect the property themselves. No setup for staff and no manicured lawns.

62
63 Councilmembers commented as follows:

- 64 • When the idea first came up to look into the uses of Carothers, a lot of what was talked
65 about had to do with budget. The Task Force final report looks like a lot of expansion. I
66 still have concern about whether the numbers are going to be reduced in the long run. Per
67 the numbers, the house, casita, and more than one acre is valued at \$875,000, which is a
68 substantial asset. It's not a building that we would necessarily want just left open. There
69 are very nice amenities in the home and around on the grounds. Just making it into the
70 Community House is not feasible. It needs more care. Security has been an issue in the
71 past. This was someone's home that needs a certain amount of maintenance and care. The
72 nature center idea is wonderful, and I love our trail system and our parks, but a nature
73 center is a very big ask. Who will market and manage it? What's the budget? Who will
74 secure it? What type of staffing will be needed? What type of facility operations will
75 occur? So while it is exciting that we've opened the conversation, there is still a lot more
76 work to be done. Mr. Popken stated that the task force realizes that there are budget
77 pressures and that's why the partnerships were stressed in the final report. The nature
78 center is not a big lift for the city financially, if there is outside assistance with grants and
79 non-profits. The task force understands that there are critical budget issues here and
80 expansion, like connector trails, is a significant amount of money. If the City did nothing,
81 there is only a savings of close to \$200,000. It's costing \$12,000 per year to mow, even
82 now that the City has stopped maintaining it as a manicured lawn.
- 83 • Leaving the house empty is not a solution. There is depreciation on piece of property that
84 is sitting there and deteriorating.
- 85 • There are a few negatives: upkeep and maintenance of the building. The right thing and
86 best thing for the City is to make the house into a nature center. I really believe if a
87 committee or group started talking to businesses, and there are business owners around
88 here that say they would help, it could work. People would have to get out and talk to the
89 businesses. We would talk to multiple companies because we need that type of money.
90 Maybe get businesses to sign long term contracts to maintain. It was done with NRG

91 stadium. There are lots of cool things you can do with it. We can make it more than nature
92 because there is a lot of history there as well. Of course the house will have to be
93 maintained, but if corporations take care of it, then the expense is off of the City. With
94 trails open, with signage and getting people there, that would work. People ask me about
95 it all the time. Talking to corporations would really help.

- 96 • All the people who served on the task force are extremely passionate and knowledgeable
97 about this subject matter. My concern, while wonderful in theory, is the amount of time
98 and legwork it would take staff to establish connections with organizations and search out
99 grants. The Open Space and Trails Committee is fantastic at searching out grants, but I'm
100 fearful that it's extremely intensive, and at a minimal will require staff intervention, if not
101 staff leading. I don't know how Council could ask staff to take on one more thing,
102 especially in the middle of the SH 146 project. Mr. Popken explained that the task force
103 realizes that very little staff time is available to continue with the use of the house and
104 casita, and opening up the park, so a volunteer base is critical for moving forward with
105 long term plans. There is a small amount of money in the proposed budget, and grant
106 writing is an art, and it will be a key way to make this happen. This will have to happen
107 from a volunteer base. The task force is not asking the City to do the heavy lifting.
- 108 • I guess I don't know that we've given it enough chance to continue to empower the task
109 force or to decide to sell.
- 110 • Hopefully we can make a decision soon, as further delay as to what to do is detrimental
111 financially. We need to remember the impact to the resident who live adjacent to the
112 property
- 113 • We need to make a motion to continue the task force and have that task force of volunteers
114 continue to investigate uses for the house and show what it would cost to open up the trails
115 and to go out into the community and see if we can get partners.
- 116 • I would want more specific costs, what can we really legally do under agreements, because
117 this is still a park. I'm not sure we can let people rent parts of parks and live there. Next
118 task force, not just ideas, but if you have a proposal for a partnership, will it really work.
119 A lot of reason corporations do some of the partnerships.
- 120 • Instruction is to have the city advertise for a task force to look at specific items such as
121 insurance, legal resident requirements, residents adjacent to property, legalities of
122 partnerships, secondary funding courses and legality of such, potential grants that may be
123 out there. Not just the idea, but the feasibility and the technical parts behind the feasibility
124 would help us make a better decision.

125
126 Gayle Cook, City Manager, stated that from staff's perspective, between the Master Plan
127 and the recommendations of the task force, there are enough ideas on the table to investigate further
128 and explore partnerships. If the task force is to continue, specific goals will need to be established.

129
130 Motion was made by Councilmember Larson and seconded by Councilmember Machol

131
132 To create a new task force to accomplish goals of delivering concrete ideas for the use of the
133 Carothers property, keeping in mind the effects on the adjacent property owners/residents;
134 identifying corporate partnerships/sponsorships and the legalities of engaging in those
135 relationships; researching the feasibility and technical aspects of allowing private enterprise on the

136 park property to include using or renting the casita as a residence, finding secondary funding
137 sources and the legalities of using those funding sources, understanding the insurance requirements
138 needed for whatever uses are brought forward, and finding potential grants to assist with funding.
139

140 MOTION CARRIED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

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142 Upon motion duly made and seconded, Mayor Kolupski adjourned the meeting at 6:50 p.m.
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144 Approved this 4th day of February, 2020.
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DocuSigned by:
Robin Lenio
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Robin Lenio, TRMC
City Secretary

DocuSigned by:
Thomas G. Kolupski
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Thomas G. Kolupski
Mayor

DocuSigned by:

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Carothers Coastal Gardens: A Proposal for the Future

January 7th, 6 pm

Carothers Coastal Gardens Task Force

Chair: David Popken

*Members: Amanda Daly, Nancy Edmonson, George Kyame, Rowena McDermid
and Council liaisons Laura Davis and Buddy Hammann*



Acknowledgments

Our gratitude goes to everyone who has worked to help the Carothers Coastal Gardens Task Force to develop recommendations that deliver both strength and depth.

On property values, we are grateful to local realtor Norman Edmonson for consulting with us and providing valuations. For plant and pollinator expertise we are fortunate that Task Force members include Rowena McDermid of the Native Plant Society of Texas, Amanda Daly of the Houston Zoo and Prairie Pollinator Pathway Project in Harris County, and George Kyame, president of the Galveston Bay Chapter of the Master Naturalists and thanks to Nancy Edmonson, Seabrook resident and former Mayor of Shoreacres for her time and expertise.

Houston Urban Biologist Jaime Gonzalez outlined for us the regional initiatives reflecting the growing movement to restore natural vegetation, and the steps needed to achieve this. During 2019 both national and statewide conferences on the topic occurred at UH Clear Lake and South Shore Harbor, with several Task Force members presenting and attending sessions.

For history, ideas, data, and administrative support, we appreciate City Manager Gayle Cook, Public Works Director Kevin Padgett, their staff and members of the Open Space and Trails Committee, chaired by Helen Burton. Finally, our thanks go to Mayor Thom Kolupski and the Seabook City Council for this opportunity to suggest possible paths forward for the park property at Carothers Coastal Gardens

Appendix: Proposed Costs

Phase 1 Proposed FY Budget Carothers Coastal Gardens

- Reduced mowing = \$12,000 (\$1,000/mo)
- Staff Time on Rentals = \$10,400 (\$200/wk)
- Fixed Costs = \$32,500
- Administrative-Grants, Etc = \$12,000
- **FY Budget Totals = \$66,900**
- Focus on trail use, signage needed = \$500
- Connector trails. 2 @ \$2800 = \$5,600
- Native seed purchases = \$400
- **Proposed FY Budget Totals: = \$73,400**

Selling a Portion of Carothers

Based upon discussions with City Staff and comments at the very first Carothers Coastal Gardens Workshop earlier this year, the Task Force was asked to investigate options for selling a portion of this park as a means to reduce or eliminate operational and maintenance expenses. The Task Force explored three possible sales scenarios. They are listed here.

The TF approached Norman Edmonson of Edmonson and Associates to give insight on projected revenues from the sale of certain assets at the park. Bear in mind that these figures are somewhat speculative due to the fact that Mr Edmonson could not find any comparable properties in order to arrive at a more market based pricing model. These values represent his considered opinion and nothing more and would naturally be subject to all fees and commissions customarily related to any real estate sale.

- Sale of the House and Casita and more than 1 acre: \$875,000
- Sale of the Casita only and less than 1 acre: \$250,000
- Sale of raw land west of the access road, less than 1 acre: \$125,000

Executive Summary

In establishing this Task Force, City Council charged us with three main tasks:

- to evaluate the best future uses for Carothers Coastal Gardens,
- to suggest how to make it more accessible to more park users, and
- to estimate likely O&M costs for our proposals.

The disproportionate amount of Staff time spent on CCG to the detriment of our other parks is the main reason this park has been under scrutiny and discussion. The Carothers Coastal Gardens Task Force is very conscious that as a small city, Seabrook faces significant constraints in parks funding and in volunteer resources. We have therefore focused on developing *realistic* proposals that take these limitations into account. Recommendations are divided into two phases: sooner and later. Sooner means now, as soon as practicably possible. Later means within the next 10 years. We urge that our recommendations in the "later" section be included in the revised Parks Master Plan.

Regarding the now, how do we get the most impact for the least cost? The Task Force believes the answer is to focus on expansion into Carothers Coastal Gardens of one of our greatest assets, our trails system. Presently, despite their inclusion in the original 2007 Carothers Master Plan, there are no delineated trails in this park. We feel that this is the number one reason it has been overlooked and underused by our citizens.

Phase 1 Recommendations: Immediate Future

For the immediate future the objective is to reduce operational costs at the park, something that has already occurred to a large degree, when the City stopped marketing Carothers Coastal Gardens (CCG) as a wedding venue. This greatly reduces the large expenses related to that effort. The second issue is one of inclusion, making CCG a viable part of our parks system as opposed to something seemingly off-limits or little known. Expanding the trail system into CCG offers the best solution. Finally, we feel that the City should treat the facility at CCG just like the Community House, with the same or similar fee structures, rules and regulations. The marketing effort should be in line with the Community House marketing, no more, no less. By lowering the bar, in essence we are expanding public accessibility, one of the key goals to come out of this TF. This should by no means be the ultimate goal, but should be considered a reasonable solution while other more ambitious plans are pursued.

A. Limit Mowing

- ◆ Mow monthly. Occasional extra manicuring as necessary. Formal beds and plantings maintained by volunteers (current scenario)
- ◆ Create low cost pathways by mowing and maintaining paths through the proposed re-wilding area.
- ◆ Introduce "re-wilding" by mowing most of the open land only twice a year (a model for this no or low-mow regime is already in use for the low wet swales in Meador Park, (see photo)
- ◆ These actions alone greatly reduce Staff time and thus expenses

B. Emphasize Trail Use

- ◆ Use new signage to encourage Pine Gully Park trails users to incorporate CCG in their walks
- ◆ Add dedicated paths for CCG pedestrian access, at the eastern edge of the existing parking lot and near the bay (see photos)



Proposed new trail shown by two yellow lines



Develop trail signage directing people to the bay and back:

- ◆ Direct them from the Pine Gully trailhead to the new CCG entrance trailhead
- ◆ Direct them along the paved fountain footpath and around the house towards the bay
- ◆ Direct them onto gravel road to the bay and back via grassy paths

Mow a grassy footpath back from the bay (later to become a fully developed trail)

- ◆ Mow curving grassy footpath returning from bay to patio
- ◆ Trail users will thus have a roundtrip route to use immediately
- ◆ Add dispenser for dog poop bags near the pedestrian entry
- ◆ Consider accessible bathrooms or a portable toilet once park use grows



The M.D. Anderson Prairie at Texas Medical Center shows how trails and prairie can interface with mowing and buildings. A similar regime can be applied to Carothers



Re-wilding at Meador Park

C. Manage Like the Community House

Make rules and regulations for rentals at CCG similar to those the Community House

While there is no pressing need for another venue to mirror the Community House and the means by which it is utilized, the Task Force feels that for the immediate future, the City should consider offering the buildings at Carothers in a fashion similar to that of the Community House, and should set rules, fees, marketing and maintenance structures accordingly. If uses of buildings at Carothers mirror Community House uses more closely, the management and staffing needs will also be similar and thus more modest. The goal here is not to generate revenue, but to continue to gain wider exposure for CCG in our community while other more ambitious solutions are pursued.

Costs and Further Comments, Phase 1

The above actions either cost very little or significantly reduce expenses going forward. City Staff has previously given both Council, the TF and our citizens budgetary guidance for Carothers when it was being marketed and used as a wedding venue. That report was the

impetus for taking a closer look at CCG and how it could be better managed and utilized. Staff have also assisted the TF in assigning operational expenses for the facility as it is presently being maintained and marketed. As mentioned earlier, there has been a large reduction in overall expenses just from the cessation of all that was necessary for it to be a viable wedding venue. Also bear in mind that some of our Phase I proposals (e.g., re-wilding) will further reduce Staff time and expenses going forward.

Additionally

Replace proposed mown footpaths with fully developed crushed gravel trails as budget allows and at whatever pace is feasible and practical given City staff and resources, volunteer efforts and grant funding available

Develop nature center components such as viewing decks and shoreline restoration as budget allows and at whatever pace is feasible and practical given City staff and resources, volunteer effort, and grant funding available

Continue to seek partners interested in utilizing the structures, still for public participation, but allowing for a richer mix of activities without putting any additional stress on City Staff or Budgets.

Our trail system is viable, is important, and is treasured and used by many. We know from historical user data collected with the help of HGAC that the Pine Gully Park trail is the most heavily used. It is not a giant leap to think that getting a viable trail system in place in CCG, using the cost-effective steps that we have outlined, will quickly produce more users.

TRAIL USE COUNTS, 2016

Formal counts were conducted in 2016 using camera traps to record user numbers on the Seabrook trails. The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) provided equipment, monitoring and analysis. Counts occurred at points in 12 parks over a period of 18 days. The full results provide real-time user numbers for every hour of every day at every counting point.

The four trail segments showing highest daily trail use were all in the wilder northern parks, where people are out on the trails to enjoy natural views and see birds and deer. *The greatest numbers of people per day were recorded in Pine Gully Park.*

Trail use numbers over 18 days:

Lowest total = 747 (18 days, Miramar Park)
Highest total = 3,835 (18 days, Pine Gully Park)

Average maximum	=	213 people/day (average max. across 12 parks)
Highest maximum	=	385 people/day (average max. Pine Gully at weekends)
Highest single day	=	561 (Pine Gully)

Note that the highest trail count for a *single* day (Pine Gully, 561 people in one day) is close to the total for almost three weeks at the Miramar Park (747 people in 18 days).

Phase 2 Recommendations: Master Plan Time Horizon, Ten Years

Longer range planning requires a more comprehensive approach: A vision for the entire park and actions that are sustainable and fit well with the upcoming master plan for all of Seabrook's parks and trails. Here we propose a rich mix of uses and partners. Please note that some components of our Phase 2 recommendations were in the original Carothers Coastal Gardens 2007 Master Plan but never came to fruition (e.g., use as nature center, trails in the wooded western section, shoreline restoration). Others are new. We do hope that all will be seriously considered as the new Master Plan takes shape.

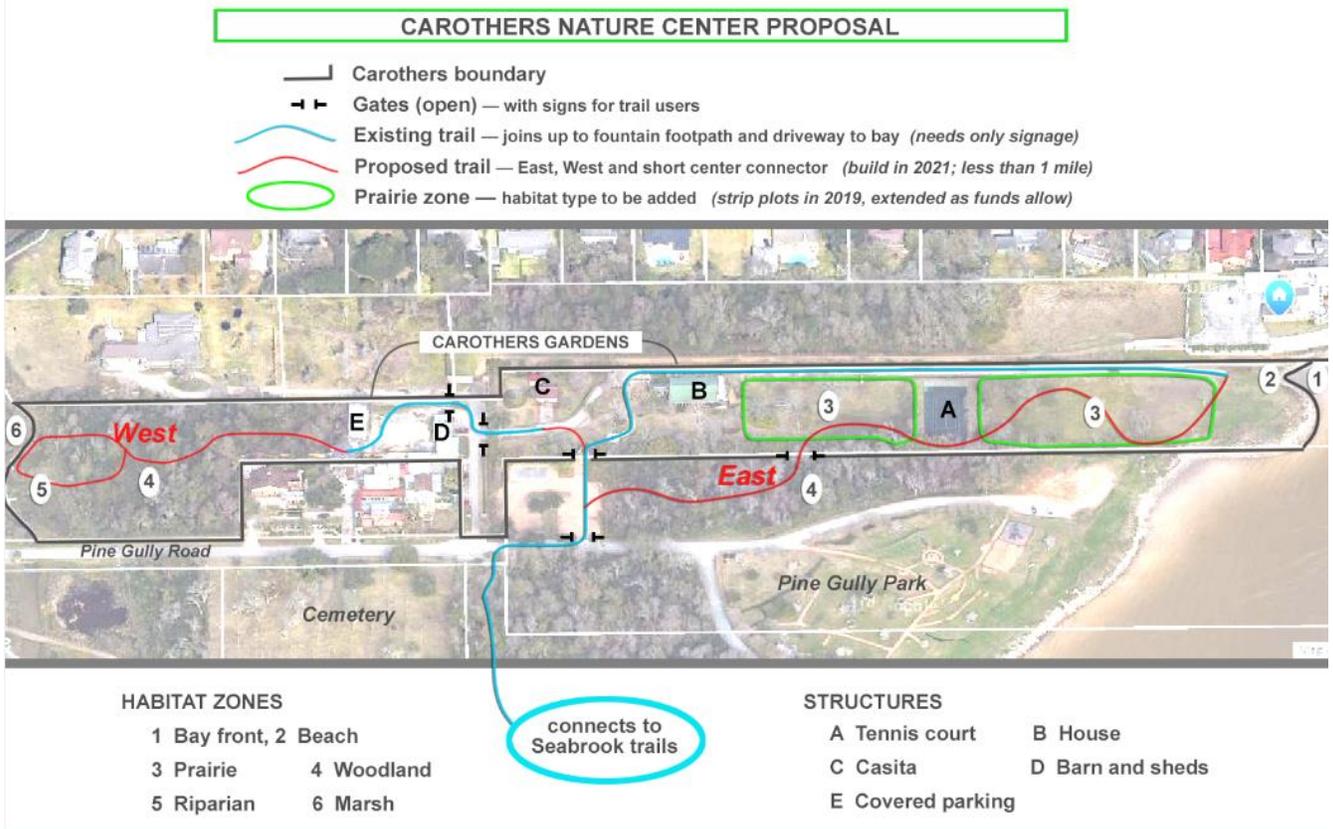
A. Revisit Actions Proposed in Original Master Plan

- ◆ *Goals, concepts, and needs:* Goals in the original master plan included a proposed bird watching platform and tower, a walking track, and making the most of the different habitat zones. *Concepts* presented in the plan went well beyond event venue ideas, including use of the property as a nature center, and the possible creation of a shoreline boardwalk as well as a kayak launch. *Needs* expressed included pedestrian connections, directional signage, dumpster relocation, and collaborating with Master Gardeners and the Open Space and Trails Committee on horticulture.
- ◆ *The western section:* The portion of Carothers at the west end currently has overflow parking, storage shed, a covered parking structure, concrete slabs, then forest and marshland. As in the previous Master Plan, this area should be included in the proposed trail expansion; new signage needed to aid pedestrian access; drainage work and/or boardwalks added as necessary; a destination viewing platform added at the marsh's edge; unused concrete slabs removed.
- ◆ *Shoreline restoration:* This proposal fits in well with other marsh restoration projects such as the successful Pine Gully restoration. We envision removal of existing rip-rap and grading to reduce the incline at the shore's edge and with volunteer help, perhaps from the Galveston Bay Foundation, undertake a shoreline marsh restoration project, which would likely include geotube barriers on the seaward edge of the planted area for protection from wave action and deep bore sedimentation.

- ◆ *Network of new trails:* As envisioned by the original master plan, from the bay shoreline all the way to the western terminus of the park at the marsh and creek.
- ◆ *Retain most structures:* House, Casita and surrounding grounds to be left in their current state, with mostly volunteer support to maintain them, with the exception of mowing done by City staff, but only on the same schedule as the other parks.

B. Consider New Actions

- ◆ *Pocket Prairie plantings or Re-wilding:* This might ultimately occupy approximately 4-5 acres, removing or re-wilding the existing St Augustine lawn from the shoreline to near the formal grounds surrounding the house, with mowed pathways around and through the area for public access and enjoyment. The concept of biodiversity is not a new one, but has gained considerably more traction in recent years as insect and bird populations are noticeably falling due to habitat loss and a warming planet. This also fits well with our pollinator pathway initiative. We envision most of this work being done by volunteers. As an adjunct, the tennis court could be utilized as a plant nursery area with an opportunity to educate citizens, especially our children, on biodiversity, seedling propagation and plant husbandry.
- ◆ *Nature Center Proposal:* This new proposal is *comprehensive* in that it encompasses the whole park, from beach and shoreline in the east to the woods and marsh at the far western end. The following plan view illustrates the six habitat zones spanning Carothers---bay, beach, prairie, woodland, creek, and marsh. Showcasing habitats is exactly what nature centers do best. The six existing structures also offer a wide range of possible activities. More on this later.



- ◆ **Partnerships:** Open Space and Trails Committee members have indicated a willingness to work to find possible partnerships made with local Master Gardeners and/or Master Naturalists to help maintain and enhance both the current plantings in the formal areas surrounding the house and casita and the native plantings envisioned for other segments of the park. Might the City be willing to lease the casita to a master gardener in exchange for a specified amount of labor per month on the grounds? Such a presence might have significant incidental benefits in terms of additional security for the facilities.

C. Identify and Develop Best Uses for the Structures

Guiding Principle: *The City provides the space, and partners provide everything else.*

The Carothers property includes the house, casita, tennis court, barn, and sheds. Potential partnerships should be explored for new low-cost uses of all structures. To be sustainable and

place minimum demands on City and Staff, the basis for partnerships should have the city providing the location, and partners providing whatever else is needed:

- equipment
- promotion
- take down
- leader or facilitator
- set up
- cleanup

◆ *Explore new potential uses for structures—some possibilities:*

Tennis court - Add shade cloth and use as plant nursery area

- Dance performance or art installation space

House - Daytime activity by repeat users (e.g., weekly yoga). All do their own set-up and take-down

- One-day art shows, doing their own set-up and take down
- Birding presentations preceding walks and counts
- A local artist's gallery combined with seasonal arts/crafts shows
- A permanent local history exhibit

Casita - Small workshop or roundtable sessions

- Changing area for photographers working with models
- Caretaker residence
- Artist-in-residence

Barn, sheds - Equipment storage

- Scout troop meetings, monthly

Covered parking and concrete pads - Pet adoption events (shade)

◆ *Systematic partner searches:* We have a highly successful and inexpensive partnership in local birding events with Stennie Meadours of Houston Audubon Society. Members of the Open Space Committee took the initiative in finding and nurturing the collaboration with Ms. Meadours. To explore what other partnering options may exist for CCG, we should reach out systematically to other nature conservancy organizations, Scouts, schools, the Native Plant Society of Texas, Environmental Institute of Houston at UHCL, GBF, local arts organizations, and science and art teachers to name but a few. For budgetary reasons, this effort needs to be volunteer led, likely again from the Open Space Committee, with perhaps some support from the City communications department when appropriate.

◆ *Corporate Sponsored Volunteer Days:* Some maintenance actions, such as painting and grounds work might be appropriate for larger volunteer groups. OSTC has ongoing working relationships with some corporations in their effort to plant more trees in the City. Why could we not expand that concept to accomplish other varied tasks at Carothers?

◆ *Artist-in-residence:* A question emerging from the Open Spaces Committee is whether an artist-in-residence program might use the casita as a short-term accommodation for creative output. Application and selection processes might be conducted by the University of Houston Clear Lake. The Dobie Paisano Fellowship is a possible model, where winners occupy author J. Frank Dobie's former ranch. This concept is a unique one, but a prime example of the need to widen the circle of ideas.

- ◆ There are doubtless many more new possibilities for both the grounds and the buildings. To our knowledge, a fuller examination of possible new uses has never really occurred. Some of the reasons behind this are:
 - Focus was on the original mandate for an events center to produce offsetting revenue
 - From 2011 to 2017, unpaid uses of the main house were not authorized.
 - Fitness and art workshops were held for only one season.
 - City trailers and equipment occupied the west end until the new Public Works building opened.

Again: The City provides the space, and partners provide everything else.

Costs and Further Comments, Phase 2

Selling a part of Carothers:

The Task Force does not endorse selling any portion of Carothers Coastal Gardens. The Seabrook Open Space and Trails Committee has passed a resolution indicating that they likewise do not favor a sale. The benefit of retaining the land and structures avoids foreclosing all options for future uses.

If Council nevertheless wishes to explore the avenue of parting with some of the property, the Task Force recommends that it only consider selling all or part of the park land that lies west of the side street easement. Any other potential sale of house and grounds or casita and grounds would, in our opinion, be too disruptive of the park's own physical continuity and its proximity to Pine Gully Park. And while public participation in our deliberations has been modest, the overwhelming public response to selling any piece of the park has been decidedly negative.

Council has also been made aware of restrictions regarding the sale of part of this asset. It has been postulated that any parcel greater than one acre would need voter approval and any parcel less than one acre would not. However, for Council to consider a sale—even while staying within the law and being responsible to budgetary constraints—it might well be seen as undermining the trust inherently given by your constituency when they voted for acquisition of this property.

Reminders on revenues: Three reminders are in order. First, noting that voters approved a tax increase specifically for debt service on the bond created for acquisition of Carothers Coastal Gardens, the Task Force wants to place on record that any discussion of park expenses should not include the cost of debt service. Second, as the current Mayor has acknowledged, parks are not expected to pay for themselves. And third, in view of these and other recent developments, the former Council's original directive that Carothers should be financially self-

sufficient should be formally rescinded to prevent it from tainting any vision for the park's future.

In summary, with a focus on sustainability and biodiversity, a nature center approach at CCG is a notably good fit for many reasons. Some of which are:

- It was the first idea explored when the Carothers property was acquired in 2007.
- It was the first idea from the mayor when operating costs provoked a review in December 2018.
- It fits well with the popularity of trails in Seabrook's wilder northern parks.
- It fits well with the Open Space Committee's initiative to join the Pollinator Pathway Project.
- Natural conditions cost less to maintain, as in Wildlife Park and Seabrook Prairie.
- Natural conditions and gravel trails are relatively easy to restore following extreme weather events.
- Trails and native plantings are low-cost infrastructure: Once gravel trails are built, the only staff time they require is for periodic surface maintenance and mowing of edges for safety.

In short, these ideas are popular. They keep coming up. When ideas recur in this way, are desirable to many, and carry modest costs, they are more likely to prove sustainable in the long term. With the proper vision and care we can grow citizen participation, retain and enhance the appeal of the structures and gardens and at the same time continue to develop CCG as a natural outdoor destination for hiking, biking and birding, as well as numerous indoor opportunities for community engagement.