

September 25, 2007

Chairman Norby and Orange County Supervisors  
10 Civic Center Plaza  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: Harbors, Beaches and Parks Strategic Plan

Dear Chairman Norby and members of the Orange County Board of Supervisors;

Having participated for the past year in the Strategic Plan process, we, the Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, want to respectfully state on the public record our disappointment over its outcome and potential ramifications.

First, we support your Harbors, Beaches and Parks Commission's recommendation of August 29, 2007, that the Strategic Plan not be adopted as written. We support the HBP Commission's recommendation to not adopt the proposed Strategic Plan for the following key reasons:

- **It does not include an independent and authoritative role for HBP in future planning for County open space:** Under RDMD, HBP is often not provided an opportunity to comment on proposed developments or planning department designs to encroach on or modify the use of public lands. The result is that the agency with most responsibility for our investment in public lands and the most interest in their protection is isolated from the decision making process. The plan does not address population growth in relation to park and open space planning. The result is that HBP has no seat at the table with other agencies in seeking future funding for needed expansion of HBP infrastructure.
- **It does not include an active and influential role for the Harbors, Beaches, and Parks Commission or public stakeholders in protecting and managing public lands:** We view the Commission as a valuable resource that can provide the public with the appropriate and deserved transparency to the decision-making process of County government. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee represents a broad spectrum of public interests and expertise in assisting the County in achieving its goals for public lands. The role of the HBP Commission or public stakeholder groups is not included in any of the discussion or recommendations of the currently proposed Strategic Plan.
- **It increases outsourcing of public lands management and habitat protection with attendant loss of transparency:** HBP must be able to provide – on behalf of the public – open and appropriate dynamic tension against the growing demands placed on Orange County public lands. Land management and habitat protection are core responsibilities of HBP. It cannot carry out this responsibility if it is silenced, relegated to a maintenance and recreation role, or if it is stripped of its influence by handing over its role to a non-public conservancy.

We entered into the Stakeholder process with the apparently naïve view that the Strategic Plan would indeed strategically chart the future of Orange County public lands. We are pleased that the document includes beneficial aspects such as acquiring an additional regional park in North Orange County, charting a plan for improved maintenance operations, providing an excellent facilities assessment, and even providing the continual visitor survey process. But it falls short in fulfilling its primary purpose; that is, it provides no real strategy for planning for the larger and longer term needs of open and recreational spaces for Orange County. Nor does it outline even a reasonable strategy for public participation in planning for the future. The end result of the Strategic Planning process in our view is that it approximates a maintenance manual, not a roadmap for the future.

Many of the public interests represented by the Stakeholders' Committee agree with the HBP Commission that this plan should not be approved as written. We ask that you listen to these voices, consider our concerns, and not approve this plan.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks stands ready to assist the County and the public charting a strategic course to meet the growing needs of Orange County's citizens and the urgent need to protect Orange County's great natural treasures: our public lands and unique habitats.

Very Truly Yours,

Jean Watt, President  
Alice Sorenson, Vice President

Cc to: Tom Mauk  
Bryan Speegle  
Parker Hancock  
HBP Commissioners  
Senator Correa  
Environmental Organizations involved with Strategic Plan

Attachment : FHBP Strategic Plan Listed Concerns