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Davis Enterprise, The (CA)

UCD announces waterway plan

David Weinsilboum/Enterprise staff writer

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University officials discussed an ambitious plan that would drastically transform the UC Davis Arboretum waterway at a brainstorming workshop Thursday at the Putah Creek Lodge. Members of a UCD Waterway Improvement Committee outlined a project that ultimately could add fish ponds to segments of Putah Creek, form a potential wetlands demonstration area and link the Arboretum to Davis' greenbelt.

Workshop leader **Mark Francis** discussed the committee's inception a year ago.

"We need to figure out a way to get rid of that green muck and try and significantly improve the water quality," he said.

For years, the waterway has been criticized for being dirty, environmentally unsound and displeasing to the eye.

UCD Provost Robert Grey, also in attendance, added that, because UCD is dedicated to the environment, the Arboretum's waterway should be used as an example of water quality and environmentally sound practices.

"We're serious about the issue and have money budgeted to take the first step," he said.

Before any significant decisions are made, both UCD officials and city staffers attending the workshop urged public input in the planning.

Officials predicted an August meeting to gather public input on ideas proposed by the committee.

In essence, the plan is to buff and shine the Arboretum, what many consider the crown jewel of the UCD campus, through revitalizing Putah Creek -- the waterway that runs through it.

During the workshop, UCD Professor Bob Powell outlined tentative recommendations on which the committee agreed based on their research into the issue.

Among the committee's suggestions:

--Redirect recaptured water from the new wastewater treatment plant into the Putah Creek flow through the Arboretum. By increasing flow, water quality would be improved.

--Control creek water levels by adding weirs or mini-dams -- aesthetically pleasing steps shifting the water depth a few inches or feet at a time. A small change in water level can improve flow and reduce the chance of stagnant water, building up bacteria and waste -- a situation that can result in filthy, green water.

--Improve the aesthetic appearance of the waterway with fish ponds and a possible wetlands demonstration area. The sites also would serve as an example of water quality.

--Engage the public in a dialogue about how to improve the Putah Creek waterway and Arboretum to best accommodate their needs.

During the brainstorming workshop, city and campus officials discussed more extensive plans, including coupling the Arboretum with the Davis greenbelt system, allowing residents to embark on a circular bike/walk route without ever having to encounter traffic.

The Interstate 80 bicycle underpass, which currently is under construction and will provide South Davis easy access to the Arboretum, also was discussed as an opportunity to improve aesthetics and water quality.

Thoughts of promoting the Arboretum as an ecotourism draw also were tossed about.

The committee will devise a Program Planning Guide, per UCD regulations, to determine costs of the various proposals. When the guide is complete, more public input will be sought, Powell said.

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