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The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Board following public consultation regarding the landscape enhancement and naming of Ernlea Reserve.

Background

Ernlea Reserve is located along the southern riverbank of the Heathcote River between Colombo and Barrington Streets. It also connects with Majestic Lane via a pedestrian walkway and Thorrlington Road through Thorrlington Reserve. A walkway meanders through a corridor of predominantly exotic woodland growing on the river floodplain and opens out to a glade which is central to the reserve. Couling Creek runs through the Ernlea Reserve glade with residential housing adjacent.

There are existing deciduous canopy trees through this area and Thorrlington Primary School planted a group of native trees and shrubs in 1990 to commemorate New Zealand’s sesquicentennial. The Parks Unit has budgeted:

1999/2000	\$15,000
2001/2002	\$8,000
2002/2003	\$5,000

Capital funds for further landscape development of Ernlea Reserve so it was considered appropriate to seek public input from residents regarding the long-term development of the area.

Board members may recall receiving a personal information leaflet from the Parks Unit showing two landscape plans (L4203 Sheet 1 and 2 attached). Included with the information leaflet was a questionnaire asking residents their preference for development of the area, either for native restoration, mixed native and exotic planting or deciduous woodland planting. **Copies of the residents response to the questionnaire are attached.**

A total of 175 households replied to this questionnaire with the results being as follows:

Ernlea Reserve Landscape Development Preference	Preferred Option
<i>Native restoration</i> – Predominantly native trees and shrubs as proposed by the Native Trees Please proposal (Planting of 2000 native trees and shrubs in the year 2000, requiring a further revised landscape plan)	55
<i>Mixed native and exotic planting</i> – Gradual replacement of the exotic tree canopy through the planting of mainly native forest trees over a number of years, similar to the Landscape plan.	70
<i>Deciduous woodland</i> – Predominantly exotic, deciduous woodland trees with some native shrub species planted under, as occurs now.	50

Whilst the results show a relatively even preference for either of the three options, a majority of residents who responded were in favour of mixed native and exotic woodland planting as the new landscape plan showed (see attached). The consultation process has generated lively debate with strong arguments for both native and exotic plantings. It has raised the profile of the reserve and has provided a snapshot of opinion regarding the native versus exotic planting preference.

Landscape Development

Comments from residents ranged from complete support to strong opposition to each of the options. Some residents strongly advocated their preference for native planting with the opportunity to bring back native birds by planting wildlife corridors along the rivers.

Comments regarding landscape character included a focus from some residents on the enjoyment of the changing seasons with exotic trees and native planting. Other residents highlighted that the character of Christchurch has been defined by its planting of deciduous trees initiated by settlers with the English influence being part of Christchurch's charm.

Requests were received for planting along the riverbank not to obscure views of the stream or limit access to the water edge. The importance of maintaining a degree of openness for safety views and light was also stressed.

Some excellent suggestions were also received. These included requests for picnic areas in the reserve, seats along the river and extra rubbish bins to be installed. Conversion of the wood-fired barbecue to gas operation, building of a duck feeding platform or jetty on the river edge, consideration for asphaltting and night lighting of paths. Something for teenagers, such as an 'art' board was requested. The need for control of noxious animal pests such as opossums, stoats and rats was also mentioned.

Requests relating to landscape planting were for more flowering plants both for feeding birds and butterflies. Retention of willow trees as they are part of Christchurch, support for native plantings, particularly low native plantings along the waters edge, and grading of the river bank to provide sites for more flax and kowhai trees. A request for Thorrington School parents and students to be involved in planting was also mentioned.

Millennium Planting

‘Native Trees Please’ which is a Turning Point 2,000 project aiming to plant representative native plant associations in each of the Community Board areas has also considered Ernlea Reserve area as a possible site for the Millennium 2,000 tree and shrub planting.

Ernlea Reserve has been mooted as a site because it is a lowland river terrace and is an ideal site to promote revegetation of native plants. Public consultation has shown a desire by the majority of residents to support native planting as long as this does not result in the removal of the exotic woodland canopy trees. It has been suggested that 800 low growing native plants could be planted through Ernlea Reserve, in the wet low lying areas along the Heathcote River walkway with a further 1200 native trees and shrubs planted along the river towards Barrington Street. Landscape plans and detail are yet to be confirmed.

Reserve Name

As part of the public information leaflet, residents were also asked for their ideas as to what the main part of Ernlea Reserve should be called. Seven submissions made comment as to their preference for the name of Ernlea Reserve. The results of this are as follows:

Reserve Naming Options	Preferred Option
Ernlea Reserve	4
Ernlea Clark Reserve	2
Thorrington or Somerfield	1
Maori name	1

As shown above, Ernlea Reserve was the favoured name by the small number of submitters who made comment. Ernlea Reserve is the name currently used to refer to the area. With the majority of people also favouring ‘Ernlea’ Reserve it is timely to endorse this name.

Conclusion

The Landscape plan that was circulated for consultation covers a mix of exotic and native plantings. At present the walkway area is a mixture of this type of planting.

The landscape plan that was distributed was acceptable to the majority of people.

Native Restoration: The landscape plan incorporated native planting around Couling Stream, and scattered through the walkway area.

Deciduous Woodland: The main concern from people who preferred deciduous woodlands was that the deciduous trees there remain. The majority were happy to incorporate some native planting underneath.

Many of the submitters commented on the area needing to be safe for walkers, with clear sight lines. The Parks Unit also feels that this is important. Some changes may be needed to be done to the landscape plan at the time of planting, to maintain the Council Safer Parks policy.

- Recommendation:**
1. That future development of Ernlea Reserve incorporate mixed native and exotic planting.
 2. Ernlea Reserve be developed according to the 'Ernlea Reserve Update Planting Plan L4203 Sheet 1 and 2, taking into consideration the Council Safer Parks Policy.
 3. That the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board recommend to Council that the land between Ernlea Terrace, Barrington Street and Majestic Lane be confirmed as Ernlea Reserve.