

# COACHING

## FOR MANAGEMENT & THE PROFESSIONS

ALAN GAIR, 6 Summerwood Court, Chico, CA 95926

Tel/Fax +1 530 892 1818 e-mail: the3gairs@aol.com

### UPDATE

### Additional ideas for discussion: The Tree Ordinance, parks and Chico's trees in the new context of sustainability

We are about to adopt a revised General plan for the city and a revised Bidwell Park Master Plan. At the same time, discussions are taking place about our proposals to extend the remit of the city's Tree Ordinance.

The tree ordinance as presently enacted protects hardly any trees and is artificially constrained to only the urban forest. This ignores the facts on the ground that the 4,000+ acre forests of Bidwell Park are embraced in many areas by the homes and businesses of the city.

The fire risk in Bidwell Park has been assessed by the state to be between *high and very high (71%/94%)*. The local airport no longer has firefighting aircraft, and the Chico Fire Department does not have specialized forest firefighting equipment.

Ladder fuels, old and downed trees proliferate are not removed from the parks, and, as most of our trees are old, they do not recover after fires.

Fires have occurred and endangered property and people. Increased park use will inevitably bring with it the risk of accidental fires, as well as natural ones, as we get dryer and windier weather. Prescribed burns are of doubtful value and very risky.

The Bidwell Park forest is old, and its old trees are not recruiting or regenerating a new forest, which is essential if we are to increasingly absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, cool the city, absorb particulate matter, provide habitat and continue to make the city beautiful.

I believe that the trees in the parks and the city's urban forest are one holistic system. Treating them as separate divides scarce resources, reduces the transparency of what goes on in the city and parks, and so the matter gets less attention from the public and the city than it deserves.

We should be planting more trees to offset the warming that we are experiencing and replacing our aging forest, but instead more and more of our city is disappearing under asphalt, parking lots and buildings. We should have a program to plant young native saplings of a variety that could withstand increased urban temperatures, in the parks and in the city.

I propose that the city bring the parks, city trees and commercial parking lots in the urban forest under the umbrella of the Tree Ordinance.

In this way, we can make the public more aware of the importance to our health of the cooling and air quality benefits of our trees and make a program for planting more trees a public project.

If this were done, we would be able to raise more money for the protection of our environment and adequately staff our city departments, so that our Urban Forester would have the staff and resources to prune our trees, mitigate tree loss and do proper fire abatement measures in the parks. It is clear that trees blow down, they die, and in the parks they lie around just waiting to be fuel for a dangerous fire. We need the public to embrace a native tree-planting program in the city and in the parks.

We need businesses, especially big box retailers, to revisit their parking lots to bring them up to current code and insist that this is done when new planning permissions are applied for.

The purists tell us that we should let the forest be natural and wait for the acorns to grow. If we do that, we will finish up with no trees and just roads, aboveground electrical cables, lamp standards and public toilets in our grassland parks.

Our city's formal written plans talk about "creative solutions, planned recruitment and natural regeneration," but that is not happening. What are we actually going to do in the short term?

We need more accountability and transparency in the way our whole urban forest is handled. We need to appreciate the contribution all our trees make to city life and give it priority before it is too late. Tree matters should not be at the bottom of and a rarely reached part of the agenda of the Finance and Tree Commission.

In reality, we are speaking about a public park with trees, damaged by lawns and irrigation, with areas of heavy use and roads and paths for cars, bikes, runners and walkers and in many areas surrounded by city streets. We cannot wait ten years to recuperate from fire damage or fifty years for the new trees to replace what we lose now.

We have global warming on our doorstep and need trees. We need to protect what we have and plan for replacement.

The plans at present lack implementation proposals and even EIRs.

**This is the time to bring together this artificially-fragmented consideration of city trees and park trees, so we can give the trees in our City of Trees the attention they deserve.**

Let us have a coherent section about trees and parks in the General Plan and link it to the Bidwell Park Master Plan, with the Tree Ordinance giving the whole plan additional muscle.

