

Council OKs burrowing owl plan

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Borrowing owl lovers rejoiced Tuesday when the City Council adopted a plan for protecting the rare ground-dwelling bird.

The plans makes it a goal to keep over 300 acres of nesting and foraging habitat for the owls in Shoreline Park and calls for the hiring of a full time biologist (with compensation of up to \$115,000) who will ensure their habitat is safe from predators and has a healthy population of ground squirrels and plenty of favorable vegetation. It also includes a \$676,000 project that moves a 9-acre storage area out of the preserve, making a swath of land along the

park's main road more inviting for the rare birds.

"This plan shows leadership," said Shani Kleinhaus, environmental advocate for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. "The fact you are looking at hiring a dedicated biologist and including this 9-acre site, we are really proud of you."

The council voted 6-1 to approve the plan with council member Tom Means opposed at the Oct. 23 meeting.

Wildlife preservationists are concerned that the rare owls could be gone from Santa Clara County within two decades. Their current numbers are at only a few dozen, spread out among bayfront areas at Shoreline Park, Moffett Field and Alviso.

"I wish other cities would do something like this, too," said Gita Dev of the Sierra Club.

The plan also encourages the development of a volunteer program with the Audubon Society and encourages local universities to become involved in research that will help save the owls.

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