



# STAFF REPORT

## Agenda Item: 5.A

**Report To:** Open Space Advisory Committee  
and Parks and Recreation Commission

**Meeting Date:** August 16, 2022

**Staff Contact:** Gregg Berggren, Trails Coordinator, [gberggren@carson.org](mailto:gberggren@carson.org)  
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**Agenda Title:** For Discussion Only: Discussion and review regarding the placement of ornamental painted rocks in Carson City parks, trails and open space.

**Staff Summary:** This item will review the placement of ornamental painted rocks placed by members of the public on trails within Carson City Parks or Open Space properties, and other trails that are managed by Carson City through licensure, agreements or easements. This item is also intended to create discussion and gather feedback from the Parks and Recreation Commission ("PRC"), Open Space Advisory Committee ("OSAC") and the public to provide direction to staff for the creation of policy and/or procedures related to how the Department should address ornamental painted rocks.

**Agenda Action:** Other/ Presentation

**Time Requested:** 30 minutes

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### Proposed Motion

N/A

### Board's Strategic Goal

Quality of Life

### Previous Action

N/A

### Background/Issues & Analysis

Discussion will include previous locations where rocks have been placed by the public, discussion of suitability, citizen feedback related to this activity and potential identification of allowable locations and/or creation of a rock garden(s) dedicated to this use. Additional discussion may include existing policies, the applicable Carson City Municipal Code (CCMC), as well as rules and regulations from other cooperating agencies.

Rock art has become an increasingly popular activity in the United States and several other countries since the founding of the Kindness Project in 2015 (<https://www.thekindnessrocksproject.com/>).

The activity involves people leaving small painted rocks with inspirational messages or artwork for others to find as a kind gesture with the intent of inspiring positivity. In some communities, local groups have created Facebook or other social media pages where they post photos and comment about each other's work. The Kindness Project, and many local groups, have rules and guidelines about using non-toxic sealants and stating that artists should seek permission from local officials and business owners to leave rocks on their property.

In many instances the rocks are placed on public property without permission, resulting in public controversy and debate on the suitability of this activity on public lands. Opponents often cite Leave No Trace principles or

equate painted rocks to unwanted graffiti or litter. The activity is considered illegal by the National Park Service (“NPS”), where painted rocks are considered graffiti and are characterized as a disruption to a visitor’s visual experience. The NPS has also indicated that painted rocks are a potential source of pollutants, as the paint breaks down over time leaving particles that may be harmful to the environment. Many local and regional park departments are developing policies related to painted rocks. Some of these departments prohibit the activity, and others have embraced the activity in a variety of ways.

Recently, ornamental painted rocks have been observed along some trails within Carson City, with varying reactions from members of the public, particularly on social media. Consistent policies are desired by staff for transparency with the public. The purpose of this item is to obtain feedback from the PRC and OSAC on potential policies and procedures to consider for how Department staff should address this activity. The discussion could include suitability of this activity within Parks and Open Space properties, and how should it be managed (designated community rock garden, etc.); potential rules or guidelines and how would they be enforced; staff procedures when ornamental decorated rocks are found on Parks and Open Space properties not designated for this use; suggested alternatives such as seeking visible locations and partnerships on private property.

See attached Exhibit A for general examples of painted rocks and rocks observed on the V&T Trail in Carson City.

### **Applicable Statute, Code, Policy, Rule or Regulation**

CCMC:

13.02.130 - *Litter*

8.36.030 - *Graffiti prohibited*

### **Financial Information**

Is there a fiscal impact?  Yes  No

If yes, account name/number:

Is it currently budgeted?  Yes  No

Explanation of Fiscal Impact:

### **Alternatives**

N/A

EXHIBIT A

Below are general examples of painted rocks:



Below are painted rocks observed on the V&T Trail in Carson City:

