

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting

Thursday, April 7, 2016

4:00 p.m.

**Board of Supervisors' Chambers
400 County Center, Redwood City**

(Chair Marico Enriquez was absent. Vice Chair Meda Okelo was the presiding officer for the April 7, 2016 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting.)

Vice Chair Okelo called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Michael Cooney, Kevin Huo (Youth Commissioner) (Arrived approximately 4:23 p.m.), Neil Merrilees, Meda Okelo (Vice Chair), Mel Pincus

Commissioners Absent: Cailan Cumming (Youth Commissioner), Marico Enriquez (Chair)

Staff and Consultants Present: Ramona Arechiga, Natural Resource Manager; Brenda Bennett, Executive Secretary; Marlene Finley, Parks Director; Ed Hallett, Harbormaster; Cecily Harris, Development Consultant; Sam Herzberg, Senior Parks Planner; Michele Laskowski, Park Ranger III – Natural Resource Specialist; Vanessa Lindorf, Consultant, Gates + Associates; Scott Lombardi, Parks Superintendent; Katherine Wright, Park Ranger II – Interpretive Specialist

Oral Communications

There were none.

Agenda Amendments

There were none.

Presentation

Introduction of Newly Hired Staff

Park Superintendent Lombardi introduced Park Ranger II – Interpretive Specialist Katherine Wright, noting Ms. Wright has worked for the County for two-plus years as a Park Aide and most recently as a term position Park Ranger II. He said in her new position of Park Ranger II – Interpretive Specialist, she would be responsible for all the department's interpretive programs assigned currently to the Sign Shop.

Natural Resource Manager Arechiga introduced Michele Laskowski, who was hired as the Department's first Park Ranger III – Natural Resource Specialist. She said that Ms. Laskowski brought a diverse and broad set of skills and experience to the position, noting she was the horticulturist for the California and Australasian native plant

collections at the UC Botanical Garden in Berkeley and previously was the seed ecologist and interim nursery manager for the Presidio Trust Native Plant Nursery.

Action Items

Review and Approve the Minutes of the February 4, 2016 Regular Meeting

Action: M/S Cooney/Pincus to approve the minutes as presented; passes 5-0 with Youth Commissioner Cumming and Chair Enriquez absent, and Youth Commissioner Huo not yet in attendance.

Review and Approve the Preferred Alternative Landscape Plan for Flood County Park in Concept and Direct Staff to Proceed with Assessment of the Potential Impacts that the Proposed Plan May Have on Noise, Traffic and Parking

Staff Presentation: Director Finley introduced the item saying that in May 2015, staff had begun looking at Flood Park and what was needed in improvements. She said it became clear that a larger process with more community engagement and a professional consultant was needed to look comprehensively at the future layout of the park and the activities that would be supported in a re-imagined Flood Park. She said Gates + Associates, Landscape Architecture, was hired through a competitive bid process to work on the project with the department. She said staff was requesting the Commission's review and approval of the Preferred Landscape Plan in concept and to direct staff to begin an assessment of potential impacts the project might have on noise, traffic and parking.

Ms. Vanessa Lindoerf, Gates + Associates, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the community engagement process that included six community meetings and an online survey that informed the development of the preferred alternative landscape plan. She said the public feedback received was to optimize preservation of the oak woodland, increase sports opportunities such as enhanced ballfield, soccer and lacrosse, and to provide a variety of uses for a range of user groups, including youth. She presented slides on the 20 components identified for the Preferred Alternative Landscape Plan including the Promenade, Focal Element, Market Shelter, Gathering Plazas, Group Picnic/Event Space, Play (All Abilities), Adventure Play, Picnic, Trails, Demonstration Garden, Basketball, Sand Volleyball, Tennis, Amphitheater, Pump Track, Soccer/Lacrosse Field, and Ballfield.

Vice Chair Okelo noted that Youth Commissioner Huo had joined the Commissioners at the dais.

Commission Questions: Commissioner Cooney asked about protecting the neighbors from injuries resulting from sports activities in the park. Director Finley said a fence would be at the back and sides of the baseball field and that lacrosse needed a higher fence. She asked if his concern was keeping the balls in the play area. Commissioner Cooney said his concern was people using the sports fields suffering injuries and filing claims against the County. Director Finley said his concern was noted.

Commissioner Pincus asked if it was feasible to make an all-purpose play field. Ms. Lindoerf said they looked at a range of options including an all-purpose play field. She said they found there were more issues with conflicts when different sports uses were in the same space. Commissioner Pincus asked about lighting. Ms. Lindoerf said there

would be no lighting. Director Finley said also amplification was not allowed in County Parks.

Commissioner Pincus asked if the picnic areas were conveniently close to parking for people bringing picnic supplies. Ms. Lindoerf said all the picnic areas were accessible and some were a greater distance from parking. Commissioner Pincus asked about the reduction in tennis courts and if existing use supported that reduction. Ms. Lindoerf said tennis was not a highly rated priority based on the input received. Director Finley noted the existing courts were in poor condition, which would also affect their use.

Commissioner Pincus noted the trail did not make a complete loop as shown and asked if that was possible to do. Ms. Lindoerf noted that the trail in places was close to other elements. She said it was possible to do a full loop with the use of the promenade and noted the plan could be adjusted later.

Vice Chair Okelo asked how the consultant would characterize the public engagement process and participation in the workshops and surveys for this project. Ms. Lindoerf said the level of participation by the public in the engagement process in her experience was high.

Public Hearing:

- Douglas Bui, (with time donated by Mary Turner Gilliland and Daniel Meehan), neighbor, said he generally supported remodeling the park. He said his concern was the level of activities, new uses proposed and increased visitors, which would increase impacts to parking and traffic. He said the two soccer fields were unnecessary and that a full sized baseball field could accommodate soccer fields. He said it was important to identify the environmental impacts of the project as well as future uses such as the Market Place. He said the Commission was asked to approve a plan without knowing the impacts.
- Joan Caldwell, neighbor, said she was against the Preferred Plan as it was trying to put too many things into a small space. She said tennis was a low impact sport whereas soccer was a high impact use, which with the high fences needed would negatively affect neighbors. She said the trail and fields were directly behind neighbors' properties.
- Nettie Wijsman, neighbor, (with time donated by Clinton Gilliland and Mitch Caldwell), said she opposed the Preferred Plan without changes to remove noisy activities away from neighbors' yards. She said that she had attended all three meetings. She said at the September meeting the presented plan showed a youth soccer field in the center of the park. She said in the December meeting, which she said was noticed late, was unexpected, and challenging in the holiday season, the plan was altered to have full sized soccer and lacrosse playing fields 30 feet away from her and her neighbors properties. She said apparently saving trees in the center of the park was more important than preserving neighbors' peace and quiet. She said the current proposal would require removal of redwood trees. She said a gate on Iris Lane would attract cars and traffic, as people would use it to drop off and pick up people using the playing fields as it was located adjacent to the fields. She said she had visited Parks and talked with staff about doing the environmental CEQA review. She said she had sent

many emails and talked with many neighbors, and noted the petition she was presenting to the Commission. She said she was told that multi-purpose fields were not possible. She said she found out that there were multi-purpose fields in a number of cities. She said neighbors should get more recognition than community members about how the park was used.

- Alice Newton, neighbor, (time donated by Carmela Meehan), said traffic was very congested on Bay Road and Ringwood and this plan would exacerbate it. She said the noise from the soccer fields would be intense every afternoon during the week and all day Saturday and Sundays. She said the Commission should reject the proposed plan and locate the full size soccer field further inside the park. She said a problem with the trail was the noise from it as it was right next to their backyards. She said children would ride bicycle on that trail and as proposed, they could ride out of sight of their parents. She said she would like play areas for different ages grouped closer together where parents would have views of all play areas.
- Barbara Bonilla, Sheriff's Office Activities League, (time donated by Mason Lok) said she supported the Preferred Plan, noting that the North Fair Oaks area had no parks for residents to go to for recreation. She said the industrialized area lacked amenities and residents' lack of access to open space contributed to negative health impacts. She said the residents in unincorporated San Mateo County would pay a high fee to use neighboring city recreation facilities than city residents, and that of them could not afford the higher fees. She said the North Fair Oaks area had only two soccer fields both located on school property. She said cities limit how many non-resident youth may play on their teams. She said they had 197 online signatures and 687 physical signatures since April 1 in support of the Preferred Plan. She said regulation of use would manage traffic impacts and noise.
- Brendan Webster, neighbor, (time donated by Marsha Silver), read her prepared letter. (Letter had been distributed to Commission at dais and copies made available for the public on the entryway table prior to meeting start.) She voiced her opposition to the full sized soccer and multi-purpose field that neighbors were opposing. She said she also opposed any partial or total removal of the adobe structure, which had been there since the park opened. She said there was a simple method to make adobe buildings seismically safe and presented her husband's technical paper on that method. She cited restoration designs her late husband had done for adobe/masonry historical buildings throughout the state. She asked the County to consider restoration of the adobe building.
- Marcos Balzaretto, Casa dei Bambini, Menlo Park, said the topic was shared schools with County Parks, not just Flood Park. He said rent increases were forcing their school in Menlo Park to close. He said Flood Park would be an ideal partnership for their school as schools were drug-free zones and would provide a presence in the park during the day. He said they would be stewards of the park and would help with such things as community gardens. He said there would be little traffic impact as many parents walked and biked with their children to school.

He requested consideration of school partnerships with other County Parks as well as with Flood Park.

Vice Chair Okelo said that Mr. Balzaretti would more appropriately have spoken under Oral Communications for matters not on the agenda.

- Alan Block, Redwood City, said he commended the Preferred Alternative Plan as it addressed the needs of a significant group of people in the community. He said neighbors' objections to noise were supportable and suggested noise impacts could be ameliorated. He said multi-use fields or joint fields did not work. He said having a field with a large fence was an integral part of the plan.
- James McCarthy, park neighbor, said that Flood Park should be reimagined without soccer and lacrosse fields. He said it was the most unique park in all of San Mateo County for its oak trees, beauty and serenity. He said many activities were available there already. He suggested reframing the plan to highlight the parklike setting and not playfields.
- Geovanni Avendano, Siena Youth Center, said he was representing the Bull Dog Riders, a youth group, who like to mountain bike and bike ride. He said in North Fair Oaks these youth did not have enough green space to ride bikes and develop their skills, and learn the discipline of these sports. He said the proposed pump track at Flood Park was an investment in the community and a resource for these youth.
- Ethan Aronson, Menlo Park Legends, said he had been on this team four years and it was a college age team. He said they needed a full sized baseball field to play and practice. He said they have been practicing indoors with only a batting cage. He said he supported the ballfield as proposed in the plan.
- David Klein, nonprofit Menlo Park Legends Baseball, (additional time donated by Michael Aronson) said his organization provides opportunities for youth with all skill levels and socio-economic backgrounds. He said he was essentially representing thousands of baseball families in the community if Little League was included. He said there was a crisis in the area as there was not even one full sized baseball field in Menlo Park since the shuttering of the baseball field at Flood Park. He said the Legends practice on soccer fields, a dirt lot in Redwood City, and a patch of grass at a city park. He said they needed a full sized baseball field and soon as many related programs were in jeopardy. He said that a full sized baseball was a greater need than another soccer field.
- Rafael Avendano, Director of Programs at the Siena Youth Center, and member of the North Fair Oaks Community Council, said they serve 120 youth after school. He said they supported the Flood Park proposed redesign. He said the park belongs to everyone in San Mateo County and that was a diverse population. He said the community engagement workshops for the project allowed for public input to define highest priorities for the park. He said green space was needed. He noted youth at the Siena Center had attended every community meeting on the redesign for Flood Park. He said these youth were community advocates and needed green space. He said a park with fields, trails and an amazing bike park would finally provide these youth a safe place to practice.

- Julia Aguilera said she was born and raised in East Palo Alto and attended Everest High School located in North Fair Oaks. She said Flood Park was the location of many of her family's gatherings and celebrations. She said she supported the Preferred Plan because unincorporated San Mateo County has few options for parks and Flood was the closest park to North Fair Oaks, and was important to the residents as a place for physical activity that supported a healthy lifestyle. She said her high school has no play space and fields at Flood would offer a place for their teams to practice. She said she and others went to Marsh Manor to talk to people there about the proposed Flood Park redesign, and that in one week they collected 490 signatures supporting the Preferred Alternative Plan. She said this plan was perfect for the park and would give many children and youth a place that supported a healthy lifestyle.
- David Molina-Carlos said he lives and goes to school in North Fair Oaks. He said he plays soccer with a team in North Fair Oaks, and they have only one play field located in Fair Oaks. He said the proposed plan if approved would not only benefit him and his team but also the North Fair Oaks community. He said since there was only one field his team has to use other fields for practice on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursdays. He said on Monday the practice was in Fair Oaks and that was easy for parents and the team. He said on Tuesdays and Thursdays they have to go to Burlingame and South San Francisco to practice. He said they had less priority for local city fields than teams in those cities. He said they were penalized for living in unincorporated San Mateo County. He asked approval of the Preferred Plan that would serve the community of North Fair Oaks.
- Maria Abaytes said she grew up in North Fair Oaks and there were no parks with grass there except at the schools. She said growing up she had to practice her soccer skills in her front yard, as there were no available play fields. She said that youth living in North Fair Oaks today have the same problem. She asked the Commission to support the proposed plan so North Fair Oaks residents would have more opportunities for play spaces and parks.
- Larry Moody, East Palo Alto, said he supported the preferred plan and wanted to lend the East Palo Alto voice to the discussion. He said San Mateo County has many amazing parks and trails. He said Flood Park was a very unique in that it bordered several communities. He said East Palo Alto residents have historically used Flood Park for activities such as family reunions, gatherings, quiet time, baseball, football and soccer. He said the park was very accessible to his community and residents could walk, bike and take public transportation to it. He said he liked the idea of the Menlo Legends using the field, noting they were one of the best collegiate programs nationally, and it was appropriate for them to play baseball in their own community. He said Flood Park was a County park for all of the residents of the County.
- Bill Lamkin, neighbor, said that a few years ago the County lacked funding to keep Flood Park open and wanted to sell it to Menlo Park. He said he objected to a full size soccer field and said a youth sized field was sufficient. He objected to a Farmer's Market and amphitheater because of the traffic and parking impacts that would be associated with large events. He said already park goes park in

surrounding areas to avoid the entry fee and there were only 300 parking spaces in the park. He questioned the County's ability to afford liability insurance for the pump track. He asked how many youth in Menlo Park would be served by the park and actually use it. He said it raises the question of just whom the park was supposed to serve. He said he doubted that anyone within two miles of the park would think the use of the park as a large event venue was a good idea.

- Bruce McPhee, neighbor, said other speakers had addressed many of his concerns. He said the noise level with placing the soccer field 30 feet from residential properties would destroy the peace and quiet that community has enjoyed for many years. He said redwood trees would be removed for the soccer field and those trees along the southern border provided a natural sound barrier. He said real estate experts had indicated the location of the soccer field would lower property values and destroy the natural beauty of the park. He said he has sent his statement in by email and provided copies.
- Dan McMahon, neighbor, asked the Commission and Department to consider that there were two entrances to the park – one in front from Bay Road and one in back bordering the proposed play fields. He said the plan did not include circulation through the park to allow for safe drop off and pick up of youth playing sports and he expected without that plan, the rear gate would be used for this purpose which would not be safe or viable.
- Bernadette Harland, neighbor, said her property was adjacent to the back gate and there was a problem already with people using the fire lane for drop off and pick up, and parking. She said the parking needed for increased uses at the park had not been addressed. She provided copies of her comments. She said the Central Park plan had been the preferred plan for the community and did not include soccer fields. She suggested combining the baseball and soccer field use and including community gardens.
- Beatriz Mancía, Redwood City, said her two sons were soccer players, and with only one field in Fair Oaks, it was hard for practice noting parking there was bad. She said soccer was becoming more popular in the United States. She asked the Commission to approve the preferred plan.
- Mases and Jacob Mancía, Redwood City, declined to speak.
- Doug Appleton, San Carlos, said he was the founder and president of Firehawks Lacrosse Club, a youth club. He said lacrosse was the fastest growing sport in U.S. He said since founding the Club 10 year ago, they now had over 500 youth players, and had started a second club in Menlo Park, the Grizzlies, with over 300 players. He said they feed into 12 different high schools, but do not have fields. He said they supported the preferred plan and a field for lacrosse, and noted lacrosse could not share with baseball as the sports have the same season.
- Whitney Thwaite, neighbor, said there was another plan that had the soccer field more in the center or closer to the community garden. She said that was a better solution for drop off and pick up and to have quieter space next to the neighbors' homes.

- Phil Corey, neighbor, said he had lived next to the park since 1956. He suggested putting the soccer field where the ballfield was, and that a soccer field with minimal goal change could be used for baseball. He said he was concerned with 60-year-old redwoods being removed to relocate the tennis courts.

Vice Chair Okelo closed the public hearing.

Commission Comment: Vice Chair Okelo suggested due to the hour continuing the remaining agenda items to the next Commission meeting agenda.

Action: M/S Cooney/Merrilees to continue all remaining agenda items to the June meeting agenda; passes 6-0 with Commissioners Cumming (Youth) and Enriquez absent.

Commissioner Merrilees thanked the members of the public for attending. He asked how locating the soccer field toward the center of the park affected the trees. Ms. Lindoerf said that the oak trees were most likely protected by the City of Menlo Park's heritage tree ordinance and that the community objection to their removal or any impact to them had been so strong that the proposal to have a field near the center was dropped, and had not been further studied to see if it was possible.

Commissioner Merrilees said the soccer fields seemed very close to the neighbors. He suggested the higher use impacts should be further away from the neighbors, and to look at the more central location for the soccer field or twist the soccer field away to get as much distance as possible between it and neighbors. He noted that neighbors and other County residents enjoy the park, and there was conflicting interests. He said he appreciated the neighbors for keeping an eye on the park. He said the park served all the residents of San Mateo County.

Commissioner Cooney said he had concerns with the limited parking and how youth using the playfields would be dropped off and picked up. He asked about the SFPUC land and if it was possible to use it for parking. Director Finley said that a school property that was not in use was located behind the park. Commissioner Cooney suggested looking into whether that area might be acquired for parking. He said he liked the plan.

Vice Chair Okelo said the Commission was being asked to approve a conceptual plan, the proposed preferred alternative plan, and this was not the final plan. He said the next step would be to do environmental review, and study impacts and determine mitigations for parking, traffic and noise. He said after that another public meeting would be held on the plan that evolved after that review.

Commissioner Pincus said the plan would have environmental review. He asked if there was an idea now if there were mitigations for parking and traffic. He said he supported the plan. Director Finley said the department has on call traffic and parking consultants and would use them to develop those studies as part of the CEQA review.

Commissioner Cooney moved to approve the Preferred Alternative Landscape Plan for Flood County Park in concept and direct staff to proceed with assessment of the potential impacts that the proposed plan may have on noise, traffic and parking. Commissioner Merrilees said he would like to amend the motion to move the plan to the next step to include investigation of relocation of the soccer field. Vice Chair Okelo said

his concern was that they needed a plan for the noise, traffic and parking consultants to review to report back on what its impacts would be, and to proceed from there. Commissioner Merrilees said he would second the motion as made by Commissioner Cooney, noting that he would work with future groups to get the best plan for neighbors and users.

Action: M/S Cooney/Merrilees to approve the Preferred Alternative Landscape Plan for Flood County Park in concept and direct staff to proceed with assessment of the potential impacts that the proposed plan may have on noise, traffic and parking; passes 6-0 with Commissioners Cumming (Youth) and Enriquez absent.

Vice Chair Okelo recognized staff's suggestion that the last few minutes of the meeting be used to present Commissioner Pincus with a resolution honoring his 11 years of service on the Commission.

(Following items were continued to the next regular Commission meeting.)

Receive Informational Report on the Coyote Point Eastern Promenade Rejuvenation Project 90% Plans and Authorize the Parks Director to Submit the Project's California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration Addendum to Regulatory Agencies

Authorize the Parks Director to Prepare a Consolidated Staff Report, Summarizing Key Projects, Events, Budget and Other Highlights for the Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Agenda

Staff Reports

Director's Report

Harbormaster's Report

Parks Superintendent's Report

Natural Resource Manager's Report

Fiscal Officer's Budget Report

Park Planner's Report

Community Program Specialist's Report

San Mateo County Parks Foundation

Executive Director's Report

Commissioner Reports

Adjournment

Vice Chair Okelo adjourned the meeting at 5:58 p.m.