



Park and Recreation Commission Meeting  
Wednesday, April 28, 2004  
7:00 p.m.  
Council Chambers Garden Room,  
Community Center  
7007 Moeser Lane, El Cerrito

1. **Roll Call**

Park and Recreation Commissioners: Michele Jawad, Ken Lerch, Chair; Greg Lyman, Rosemary Loubal, Michael Sommers, Harvey Wittenberg  
Staff Present: Christopher Jones; Bruce King, Maintenance and Engineering Manager; Monica Kortz, Recreation Director; Lori Teachout, Management Assistant

2. **Oral Communications From The Public**

Jim McKissock, 516 Richmond St. distributed copies of photos of the Canyon Trail teepee, elevated platform and canoe. He feels that these pieces of equipment are dangerous and should be removed.

4. **Commission / Staff Communications / Announcements**

Commissioner Loubal reported that at Earth Day, April 24, 2004, and saw butterflies at Baxter Creek, evidence that there are positive things happening with the restoration of the natural habitat.

5. **Approval of the Minutes: (Action: Approve)**

**Meeting Minutes from March 24, 2004 (Exhibit 1)**

Commissioner Loubal requested that her comment regarding the Portola Middle School fence be included in Item 6. She thought that rather than a chain link fence, that it would be a good idea to have a rapid growing bush, such as bamboo. Stating that there were no objections, Chair Lerch moved to accept the minutes as amended. The minutes were accepted unanimously.

6. **Community Service Sign and Free Handout Guide for informing the public about Birds of Canyon Trail Park: (Action: Approve) Alison Brantley (Exhibit 2)**

Prospect Sierra Kindergarten teacher, Katherine Lee, and parent, Alison Brantley, described the Canyon Trail bird sign project. Discussion followed regarding perpetuation of the project by future students, postcard sales to fundraise for this project, plastic holders for the informational flyers, the possibility of writing the name of the birds on the reverse side of the postcard, commercial sales of the postcard, additional text on the sign and information regarding the postcard, and monitoring the flyers so that they do not create a litter problem.

Commissioner Lyman moved to recommend to the City Council that the group be allowed to install a sign and brochure dispenser box as described in Exhibit 2 and have Prospect Sierra maintain the display. Commissioner Sommers seconded the motion. Commissioner Jawad confirmed that Prospect Sierra School (not the City) would be responsible for the installation. The motion carried unanimously.

Kortz will relay this information to the Council in her weekly Council report so that Prospect Sierra can start on this project as soon as possible.

7. **Master Fee Schedule Update: Monica Kortz, Recreation Director**

Kortz distributed copies of the Recreation Department, Swim Center, Youth Services and Senior Center budget. She explained that this report reflects this Commission's recommendations and an increase of 3% across the board, with the exception of Swim Center fees. The Swim Center Fees will be revisited at a later date, as revenues and expenses are monitored and evaluated

during its first six months of operation. The fee schedule will be posted on the City website before going to Council for approval.

**8. Public works Plans for implementation of the Vallier Report: Bruce King, Maintenance and Engineering**

King explained that the Vallier Report, an inventory and assessment of the City's parks, and the Mactec report, an evaluation of the City's infrastructure, indicated that there is a substantial gap between what we are spending on our facilities and how much we should spend for an acceptable level of maintenance. These reports assisted the City in its GASB 34 reporting requirements.

Chair Lerch recalled that the Commission made a number of recommendations from the Vallier Report. Some of these suggestions were no-cost maintenance procedural issues, for e.g., changing the weed-eater string trimming practices so that there is no damage to trees, and asked if some of the past practices have been changed with these suggestions in mind. King explained that Tru Green, the City's former landscape contractor, recently terminated its contract with the City. The new landscaper, D&H Landscaping has shown improvement.

Some of the findings of the Vallier and Mactec reports are:

The Vallier report focused on the maintenance of the City greenscape, recommending an annual budget of \$660,000 per year to maintain an acceptable level. The current budget is \$260,000.

Mactec's recommendation of \$3.8 million to upgrade City facilities does not include a new City Hall. There is an additional recommendation of \$260,000 annually just to maintain the facilities. The current budget is \$60,000. Some of these costs would be covered under the Landscaping and Lighting Assessment District.

Discussion followed regarding the street tree planting budget of \$20,000, and what operations were included, how irrigation repairs were addressed, and the planting the Vallier Report recommended for this area.

Discussion followed regarding what services are included in the citywide landscape budget of \$60,000. King explained that it includes services such as mowing, maintenance for trees up to 15' in height, pruning, repair pathways, and graffiti removal, replacement of some plants, usually damaged items.

Jim McKissock asked if there were funds designated for abatement of hazardous situations. King stated funds for these come under the maintenance budget, and there is not a specific fund for hazardous conditions. Chair Lerch asked if there were funds to repair dangerous playground equipment. King stated major removals are budgeted as capital projects, and we currently do not have funds for that specific purpose. However, the City would take care of hazardous conditions. Chair Lerch stated that he appreciated King's effort to identify park maintenance issues as unfunded projects. Kortz stated that the budget will be on the Council agenda May 17, 24, and June 7, with the adoption on June 21, 2004.

Commissioner Loubal stated her appreciation of having the information regarding what the needs are and how much the City actually budgets.

**9. Public Works Budget for FY2004/05 as it relates to parks: Bruce King, Maintenance and Engineering**

King stated that this year's proposed budget will have no increases. Items to note in the budget are:

- a. Canyon Trail Field rehabilitation: This project is rolled over from last year because it was underfunded and could not be completed. Additional funding was requested for this year to insure the project's completion.
- b. Tassajara stairs: Funds were requested for this project to include some rehabilitation of the playground area.
- c. There is a request for \$50,000 for an Urban Forest Plan, for a consultant to develop a plan for the City's greenscape.
- d. An emergency generator will be fully funded for next year.
- e. Kortz explained that Huber Park has been identified as an unfunded project. Because of the steep grade of the driveway and the rest of the park, and because of the American with Disability Act mandated improvements, playground improvements would be an estimated \$500,000. The public needs to be made aware of the costs involved in improvement of that park.
- f. There is a request for \$22,000 Canyon Trail Park replacement of the geodesic climbing dome with a small piece of equipment. The City will be looking at finding funding for that.

Discussion followed Commissioner Loubal's request for definition of public right of way and medians. She listed some easements and stairs and asked if any were scheduled for future improvement, and asked if these would be suitable for volunteer projects.

Commissioner Sommers asked about about the allocation of \$20,000 for tennis court maintenance. King stated that this included minor repairs only.

Discussion followed regarding the \$220,000 Landscaping and Lighting Assessment District (LLAD) and the \$750,000 General Fund contribution, the components of the Maintenance and Engineering budget. King explained the LLAD covers street light energy costs, some of the salaries of the maintenance workers, equipment operation, irrigation and utility bills. Discussion followed regarding the Canyon Trail Petroglyph projects and the field rehabilitation project, which are two distinct projects, at different ends of the park. King explained that the removal of the equipment (teepee, raised platform and canoe) and renovation of the playground area (installation of landscape material and interpretive information) will occur concurrently.

Commissioner Loubal stated that she felt the Lions or Rotary, or whoever installed the tee pee and canoe should be thanked for their effort. King stated that the contractor who did the landscaping installed those features in the 1960's, and there is no one to thank.

Rich Schwartz stated he had volunteers to remove the teepee, canoe, and platform, with appropriate liability insurance and equipment to do this work. King stated that the City attorney would need to be consulted to insure that there is no conflict with local labor unions. Commissioner Wittenberg stated support of allowing a volunteer group to do the removal. Chair Lerch concurred, adding that the difference between this project and the Cerrito Vista Park shed (which El Cerrito Youth Baseball was trying to construct with volunteer labor), is that this is a hazardous situation.

Councilmember Abelson stated she had an experience working with the local labor union and the School District. The union allowed a painting project to continue at Harding Elementary School with volunteer labor with the supervision of a union member.

Kortz stated that Schwartz should contact staff. She stated she will look at the Council Resolution to ensure that Council has already given Staff support to remove and replace the playground equipment.

Commissioner Wittenberg asked if increases in property taxes (as homes are sold), translate into increased revenues to the maintenance department. King explained that those funds usually go to the General Fund. Commissioner Lyman asked about the possibility of increasing the LLAD, since it has not changed since 1988.

Rich Schwartz stated that a year ago the City Council agreed by Council Resolution to accept these seven proposals:

1. Create a baseline condition of the petroglyph, for future comparison
2. Move children's playground equipment
3. Remove sand
4. Restore native plant community
5. Kiosk signs, interpretation
6. Conduct archeological research
7. Ongoing education to local students

BARARA (Bay Area Rock Art Research Association) is trying to raise \$40,000 for the following projects:

1. \$20,000 for native landscaping
2. \$15,000 for film production of a documentary of the project involving Prospect Sierra School.
3. \$4,000 site stewardship training
4. \$1,000 library donations, for books about petroglyphs for the Prospect Sierra School Library

Schwartz asked for \$10,000 in matching funds from the City. Councilmember Abelson suggested that the books be available at the public library, rather than the Prospect Sierra School library.

11. **Discussion of parameters of the Commission's responsibilities in the areas of things such as murals, criteria for discussing cultural issues, including the murals at the Cerrito Theater, the teepees at Canyon Trail and the Petroglyph:** Ken Lerch, Park and Recreation Chair

Commissioner Jawad recommended that the Park and Recreation Commissioners discuss items only within its charter. Commissioner Lyman read from the Commission handbook that the Park and Recreation Commission acts in an advisory capacity in matters regarding public recreation, parks, playground, landscape, childcare, the arts, education and entertainment. With the advent of an arts commission, there is some ambiguity about the responsibilities of each commission.

Councilmember Abelson stated that further clarification can be made by City Council, if necessary.

Chair Lerch stated he was not in favor of turning all issues regarding arts over to the Arts Commission. His interpretation is that in a discussion of art would be appropriate when it affects recreation. In his view the mural is an arts commission issue and is a social and art issue. The teepee loosely qualifies as art, but represents a safety issue in the park.

On the issue of determination of agenda items, Commissioner Lerch stated that he envisioned the role of the chair as a "traffic cop", and determining whether there is time on a given date to hear an item, and not the ultimate authority on whether an item would be agendized.

Commissioner Loubal stated that the Community Center mural is seen as culturally insensitive, and felt that this should be seen as a political correctness issue. She felt that the Park and Recreation Commission should be open to hearing issues of political correctness and historical correctness. She read the following prepared statement as a suggestion: "Park and Recreation Commission recommends that if criteria of historical or ideological correctness are to be used in removing (like taking out a teepee or canoe) modifying or promoting public art or artifacts in El Cerrito then applicable guidelines be followed by this commission and all other commissions, which would first be developed and clearly spelled out by the relevant Commissions and approved by the City Council with full public participation." In other words we should follow the standards that all other groups in El Cerrito are using. This is her first attempt to get this Commission online with all the other groups.

Discussion followed whether Councilmember Abelson should introduce the topic of the evaluation of this Commission's charter and purview to the City Council. Commissioner Wittenberg stated that he did not support asking the City Council to re-define or further clarify this Commission's

role. He stated that doing so might just add another layer of confusion. It was determined that further discussion on this item by Council would not be necessary.

Discussion followed regarding the venue for future discussions of trees and the distinction between the public right of way and private property,

12. **Staff Update:** Monica Kortz, Recreation Director
  - a. Progress on Arlington Barbecue Repair/Removal: Staff has been able to accomplish the suggested punch list of the Fire Department, including removal of the dangerous barbecues, and broken fire pit. Staff will continue to look at other parks and barbecue areas.
  - b. Cerrito Vista Tennis Lights: The lights are scheduled for their final inspection. The lights should be ready the middle of May.
  - c. Swim Center Grand Opening: The grand opening on April 3 was an overwhelming success with an estimated 800 attendees.
  - d. July 4<sup>th</sup> Planning: This year the Circus Chimera will be an added feature.
13. Items For Next Meeting
  - a. Rental Activity
  - b. Tanaka will present concept design for the Arlington Park and the Ohlone Greenway.
3. Council Liaison Report: Councilmember Abelson  
The City Council has not yet seen the budget. There are a lot of unknowns, such as the Utility Users' Tax. Earth Day was well attended. The School District is proceeding with plans to relocate Kensington School on the Portola Middle School blacktop, in spite of concerns about traffic and safety. There will be about five hundred children sited in these portables. Commissioner Lyman noted that at the last meeting, when Bill Savage, architect for the project, stated that the School District has no intention of using the Cerrito Vista Park or the Community Center.
14. **Adjournment**  
Commissioner Wittenberg moved to adjourn, and Commissioner Loubal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.  
The meeting was closed at 10:10 p.m.