



# County of Santa Cruz

## PARKS, OPEN SPACE & CULTURAL SERVICES

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BARRY C. SAMUEL, DIRECTOR

## PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Monday, February 12, 2007

Government Center, Board Chambers

7:15 p.m.

701 Ocean St., 5<sup>th</sup> Floor

Regular Meeting

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

### I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:17 p.m.

Members: Janet Doten, Dave Mercer, Katharine Minott, Michael Rosenberg  
Francisco Serna

Present: Janet Doten, Dave Mercer, Katharine Minott, Michael Rosenberg,  
Francisco Serna

Staff: Barry Samuel, Clark Beattie, Gretchen Iliff, Beth Porter

### II. AGENDA MODIFICATIONS OR APPROVAL

The agenda was approved as amended – Item V was switched with item VI to allow the people who wish to comment on agenda item #1 adequate time. (Minott/Mercer 5/0).

### III. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes of January 22, 2007 were approved as written. (Minott/Doten 5/0)

B. Information and Reports (Accept and File)

- 1) Facilities Division – Status Report
- 2) Maintenance Division – Status Report
- 3) Planning Division – Status Report
- 4) Recreation & Cultural Services Division – Status Report
- 5) Arts Commission Agenda February 5, 2007

The Information and reports were accepted and filed as written (Mercer/Serna 5/0).

### IV. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

David Moore of Aptos spoke about his concern regarding weed control in the county.

### V. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Samuel officially informed the Commissioners that he is retiring March 30 of this year. He expressed satisfaction with all that the department has accomplished along with the enjoyment of working with the Parks Commission.

The recruitment for the new director began on January 29 and the County Administrative Officer anticipates filling the position by April.

At the January meeting, Commissioner Minott asked about the tire grant for the Highlands Play area. The grant has been received and the bid to replace the play area is expected to go out in early March with the target for completion in September.

A meeting took place with the architect who is designing the Swim Center renovations. Bidding is anticipated in March with the return of bids in May. This would allow for construction to begin in July.

Commissioner Mercer suggested at the January meeting that a consideration could be given to fund-raising to continue the Senior Citizen scholarship fund that has been established through the bequest of Peggy Nielson. Mr. Samuel discussed with the Auditor Controller the idea of using Ms. Nielson's gift as an endowment that would enable the department to use only the interest to give about 150 scholarships per year in perpetuity.

There will be a community meeting held on February 21 at 7:00 p.m. concerning redesigning and renovating Floral Park on 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Mr. Samuel recommends that if Commissioners would like to attend, no more than two Commissioners should be there due to the Brown Act.

Mr. Samuel had a meeting with Jessie Nickell of Barry Swenson Builders. They have offered to lease the bike area in front of the Aptos post office to the Parks Department. The lease would be for 12 months with a month-to-month lease thereafter. The lease is being drawn up and will be presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

## **VI. REGULAR AGENDA (DISCUSSION ITEMS)**

### **A. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

#### **1. Dogs Off Leash at the Polo Grounds**

Since the January meeting, Mr. Samuel has given the subject a tremendous amount of thought. The Parks Department built the first enclosed dog park in the County at the Polo Grounds and worked with a group that wanted to have a dog park at Pinto Lake County Park. In cooperation with the group, that dog park became a reality. Dogs are allowed on leash in all the County Parks except Quail Hollow Ranch County Park, which is a nature preserve. The Parks Department is dog friendly. The Commission is reminded that the plans for the Farm Park include an off leash fenced area and off leash, fenced areas will be included in all new park designs. Staff is concerned with the interface between off leash dogs and people, especially children.

There are a substantial number of people who have dogs as companions in Santa Cruz County and these people seek places to take their dogs to run and exercise off leash while they walk around and get their own exercise. This group is another constituent group such as the soccer, baseball, basketball or tennis players. Here in Santa Cruz, the history is that when a group wants a new park or new facilities, as happened at Polo Grounds, the group organizes and through volunteer efforts, raises funds or tax themselves to see their project become a reality. The Par 3 property in Aptos is in a similar situation. A group of citizens is trying to organize to raise funds to purchase the property for a golf course. It is definitely agreed that more off leash dog areas are needed, however, the current parks inventory does not contain areas that would lend themselves to this kind of use. Mr. Samuel suggested that the dog constituent group organize and as has occurred with other groups, raise the funds to purchase property specifically for their purpose, off leash dog parks. The Parks Department will commit itself to maintaining these

areas when they are acquired. Staff and Mr. Samuel are available to answer any questions.

Commissioner Rosenberg asked about the County's liability if off leash areas were established in the Parks. Mr. Samuel will contact County Counsel and Risk Management to seek their opinion with information provided at a future meeting. Commissioner Minott asked if the issuance of citations received by dog owners for running their dogs off leash in the great meadow at Polo Grounds was a reason for their attendance at the Commission meeting. Ms. Minott also asked if a representative from Animal Services was present; there was not an animal control staff member attending this meeting, however one will be invited to attend a future meeting when this item is on the agenda. Commissioner Mercer asked if the County liability would be affected if the off leash areas were available only during certain specified hours of the day. Dogs off leash in an area that is not posted do create a liability issue. The Polo Grounds went through an elaborate master plan process with active public participation. It was determined through that process what was acceptable at the property. The area where the current dog park is located is operated through an interim use permit. That area is designated for future use as a community building. Due to the reality that building a community building will take place in the future, the Planning Department agreed to issue a temporary permit after an environmental review. An enclosed area for dogs would not be considered an environmental problem. The great meadow is designated to remain a wildlife area in a natural state. To evoke a change in the master plan, multiple public hearings are required before the Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Many neighbors of the Polo Grounds did not want a park built in any form on the property. State parks only allow dogs on leash and they will not consider creating any off leash areas due to state laws.

Chair Rosenberg offered the audience the opportunity to speak to the Commission with brief comments requested. Several speakers spoke of Garland Ranch Regional Park in Monterey that allows off leash access. In Pacific Grove, off leash is allowed in some park areas of Monterey Regional Peninsula Park District. Several speakers mentioned that walking dogs within fenced areas does not allow for exercise that is sought by people and dogs. Dog owners want to find a place to take dogs off leash that is not fenced and that is specifically for dogs. Several people mentioned that the wood chips in the dog park cause problems with their dogs' paws. The Commissioners discussed the possibility of replacing the chips with some type of grass for the comfort of the dogs. One speaker reminded the commissioners that his wife spoke last month about the terrifying experience of their child being attacked at Polo Grounds by an unleashed dog. The park was created with children in mind and the park should be for sports and children. He agreed that dog owners need a place to exercise their dogs however, a park with children playing is too risky. Ten dog owners spoke on behalf of off leash areas for dogs with two speakers against off leash areas.

Mr. Samuel explained that a majority of County Parks are developed with swing sets, playgrounds, mini skate parks, basketball, etc. Every park was reviewed for possible use as off leash dog areas. Santa Cruz County is the second smallest County in the State with limited land availability for parks. There is a lot of acreage contained in State parks and most local beaches are state property – no dogs are allowed off leash on any state property. The County Parks do not contain adequate acreage to designate off leash areas. Skate parks and BMX bike areas limit liability with signage. The great meadow at Polo Grounds is mowed for fire safety purposes with a path for walking and maintenance access to the well for the property, located behind the meadow. Tickets have been issued for dogs off leash

because people complained that they were bothered by dogs. The tickets prompted the organization of the dog owners. Continuing dialog will take place in an effort to find solutions.

Further discussion among Commissioners included replacing wood chips with grass in the dogpark and designated time periods for dogs off leash. Mr. Samuel will discuss the liability issues with County Counsel and Risk Management and will attempt to have a report to the Commission by the March meeting. When the Commission acts on the off leash dog issue, the recommendation would be presented to the Board of Supervisors for their action.

## **2. Par 3 in Aptos**

There is popular sentiment in Aptos for raising funds for the Par 3 property. Many people are interested in returning the property to golf course use. Supervisor Pirie will hold public meetings soon for further discussion on the topic. Commissioner Minott will report on the issue as it develops.

## **3. Valencia Hall Post Office**

The final plans and specifications have been received for the Valencia Hall Post Office. The interior of the post office will be restored with half becoming the post office/museum and the other half, a re-creation of a general store of the 1800's. Residents of the neighborhood have offered to act as docents for the building. The project will go out to bid in April. Construction should begin by summer. Plans will be displayed at the March Commission meeting. Although responsibility of the Historical Commission extends only to the exterior of buildings, plans have been reviewed and approved by the Commission.

## **4. Felt Street Park Update**

The project landscape architect has submitted his cost estimate to revise the plans to satisfy the Planning Department requirements. Mr. Samuel has discussed the issue with the Director of Planning and Bob Olson is working with Planning staff. Many of their initial concerns have been answered or eliminated.

## **5. Web Site Commissioner Contact**

Parks staff is working with a professional web designer. A mailbox will be included on the web site for correspondence to Parks and Arts Commissioners. The emails will be either forwarded to Commissioners or printed and included in your packets.

## **B. ACTION ITEMS - None**

**AGENDA/MEETING FOR: Parks Commission, Monday, March 12, 2007 at 7:15 p.m. at the Government Center, Board Chambers 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, 701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.**

### **A. INFORMATION ITEMS**

1. Dog Park – Installation of Grass
2. Great Meadow Liability Issue
3. Elevations - Valencia Hall

### **B. ACTION ITEM**

**VII. ADJOURNMENT** – Meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. (Doten/Mercer 5/0)