

Goal 5, and stated Principle #1 now reads: “Educate and inform park users about the special qualities of Piper Park both cultural and environmental”. Goal 6 was changed to read: “Provide play activities for children with a range of physical and mental abilities and challenges”. There was also the addition of the following Principle: “Provide new and/or improved play facilities”. Goal 7 was changed to read: “Continue to enhance, develop and maintain park facilities for safety and to meet the needs of park users”.

Chair Blauvelt stated she was not at the last meeting but the changes to the Goals and Principles seem to reflect the discussion by the Commission. Commissioner Matteo agreed.

Chair Blauvelt referred to Goal 1, Action Item (i), “Provide a bocce court” and suggested the use of the word “consider” instead of “provide”. Commissioner Matteo stated it depended upon whether or not the Action Items were things that the City intends to do or if they are just something the City tries to move towards. Ms. Hill stated this is a Master Plan that the City is in favor of moving towards. It provides direction in the event that somebody comes to the Commission and wants to install something (golf driving range, etc.) that is inconsistent with the plan. Recreation Director Whitley stated any item in the plan would go through the Public Hearing process in front of the Commission and City Council. Chair Blauvelt stated she was fine with the word “provide”.

Ms. Hill referred to page 113, Glossary of Terms, and stated the definitions for “Active Park Area” and “Passive Park Area” was added. Commissioner Matteo stated the definitions captured the spirit of the Commissions’ previous discussion.

Chair Blauvelt opened the Public Hearing.

Ms. Frances Lehn, Madrone Avenue, stated she has been spending a lot of time at Piper Park over the last several years. She brings her dog to the Canine Commons Dog Park and is often the only person (and dog) at the park. She performed an informal survey and was told the following: 1) Dogs get sick from the bark and/or the mushrooms; 2) A lot of people are not aware of the park; 3) The dog park is too small; 4) The park was built on a dump; 5) The dog park was poorly designed and has poor drainage; 6) There is no shade; 7) The park should have a grass surface instead of dirt. She reiterated that people do not want to go to the dog park and a lot of people take his or her dog to the north end of the cricket field. She stated that Recreation Director Whitley got a bid for artificial turf in the amount of \$125,000. She noted part of the problem with the park was the drainage. She stated it would cost an exorbitant amount of money to make the dog park, in its current location, usable. She is proposing to move the dog park to the passive space north of the cricket field. The area was long, hilly, shaded, and there were benches. She stated the area has been used as an informal “dog park” for at least two years. She noted the existing dog park area would be ideal for bocce ball courts.

Commissioner McNally stated he has heard complaints that the current dog park was too small. Ms. Lehn agreed and stated the size is an issue.

Commissioner Matteo stated that since everybody was already using the area north of the cricket field as an informal dog park then why not just leave it as is. Ms. Lehn stated the sports fields and the marsh should be protected from dogs running off leash. They could install a fence on the front end and leave the back end open.

Commissioner McNally noted the area suggested by Ms. Lehn was one of the few passive areas in the park. Ms. Lehn suggested an alternative would be the area next to the Twin Cities Police Department as the new dog park.

Chair Blauvelt asked Recreation Director Whitley about the differences between the old and the new dog park. Recreation Director Whitley stated the old dog park was a rectangle that was not sloped and was a bit closer to the marsh. The Audubon Society made some recommendations for the new dog park in terms of protecting the marsh and the migratory birds. In addition, the old dog park was not divided into a small vs. large dog area. The footprint is about the same. Chair Blauvelt asked about the difference in the surfaces. Recreation Director Whitley stated the old dog park was somewhat of a “weed patch” and it would be closed during the rainy season. Staff tried to make the new park an all weather facility by using wood chips. Staff recently held several “dog park meetings” and discussed the various options for the surface inside the dog park, including the use of decomposed granite.

Chair Blauvelt stated the dog park does need more shade but it could be a problem planting trees since the soil was compacted several years ago. Ms. Hill stated the area was surcharged because there were plans for a building in that location. She noted it was like concrete and trees have a very difficult time growing in that location. Recreation Director Whitley stated the Public Works Superintendent has suggested planting four trees on the west end (outside of the fence) that will grow fast and several others near the benches. They do not want trees that would grow tall and shade the community garden from the afternoon sunshine. Commissioner Hauser stated they could install a shade structure. Recreation Director Whitley agreed.

Commissioner Hauser stated there were two issues being discussed: 1) What improvements could be made to the existing dog park; 2) Should the dog park be moved? The issue regarding moving the dog park is quite complex and beyond the scope of tonight’s meeting. There were a lot of different people using the park and moving the dog park would require dealing with different agencies including the Audubon Society, figuring out how to deal with walkways, removal of existing passive space, etc. Moving the dog park would entail a very substantial change to the park and would affect the use of the entire park. He thought the small dog area was useless and removal of the fence dividing the small vs. large dog section would be one way to expand the existing dog park. He agreed that the surface should be changed and more shade needs to be provided.

Commissioner McNally asked Ms. Lehn if she thought the existing dog park could be saved and made useful for the residents of Larkspur. Ms. Lehn stated “no” since it was not large enough. They would also need to install grass or decomposed granite and a shade structure and the funds to do all this were out of the reach of the community.

Chair Blauvelt asked about installing a shade structure. Recreation Director Whitley stated a permanent structure would need to go through the Engineering Department. It could be done but would be more costly. Commissioner McNally asked about installing a temporary structure. Recreation Director Whitley stated staff could explore this option.

Chair Blauvelt stated she was very impressed with Ms. Lehn's research and thanked her for her input. She wanted to hear from the community as a whole before making any decisions about moving the dog park.

Commissioner Matteo stated he was surprised to hear that nobody used the dog park and he asked Recreation Director Whitley what has happened. Recreation Director Whitley stated the wood chips were a big problem because they were a potential a threat to the dogs. The Public Works Department was asked to remove the chips without really having a back-up plan so the current surface is just dirt.

Commissioner McNally asked if there were other parks in Larkspur's jurisdiction that would better field a dog park. Recreation Director Whitley stated "no".

Commissioner Matteo stated Commissioner Hauser brought up some very good points. He is involved in organized sports and loves the active areas of the park but has gained an appreciation, over the years as a Commissioner, for how much the public cares about the passive spaces in the park. It will be very difficult to take away any of the existing passive space. He would not be opposed to hearing more about the proposal to relocate the dog park and getting more input from the community. He asked if the proposal to move the dog park would be consistent with the Park Master Plan. Ms. Hill stated the proposed area is one of the reserved passive spaces.

Ms. Pam McClain, Madrone Avenue, stated she liked some of the changes that were incorporated into the plan. She is strongly supportive of keeping as much passive space as possible. She noted the narrow strip south of the dog park was a drainage ditch and was not usable. She asked if the future restroom and future cricket storage shed could be combined into one building. This would take up less space. She wanted people to keep in mind that this is a broad general planning document and some of the goals and action items were too specific. She noted that demographic information indicates that the average age in Marin County is currently 48 and that 38% of Marin County residents were over 55 years of age. The document should be broad enough to accommodate the fact that uses will change. She noted she went to the dog park today with her dog and there were other dogs at the park. The dog park does need a lot of improvement and she would not want it to be relocated to an existing passive space area.

Chair Blauvelt asked Ms. Hill about the specificity of the plan and if it were flexible enough to allow change in the park. Ms. Hill stated the intent of the Goals and Guiding Principles was to maintain the balance of passive and active spaces. This was a result of community input. Chair Blauvelt noted that needs would change over the years and she asked if the plan was flexible enough to accommodate these needs. Ms. Hill stated "yes"

since the plan restricts the amount of active, but not passive, space. Ms. McClain suggested using the word “consider” and not “provide” under the list of Action Items. Chair Blauvelt stated the word “provide” simply means that they are thinking about those actions and the City would hold a Public Hearing to consider any of those items. Ms. Hill stated the Action Items were a reflection of the public input. Ms. McClain stated there were parks around the country that were incorporating “senior playgrounds” and have exercise equipment geared for older residents. Chair Blauvelt stated there was nothing in the plan that would preclude this and the only restriction would be that it occur in the active use zone. There is room within the active use zone to make changes.

Mr. Stephen Conner, Larkspur Plaza Drive, stated he liked the way the plan was put together. He referred to the Glossary of Terms and the definition of “passive park area” and noted this area could include a “water body”. He asked if this included a fountain or the marsh. Ms. Hill stated the term “natural” probably should be added. Mr. Conner stated this could include the marsh. Ms. Hill stated perhaps the word “water body” should be deleted. The intent was to indicate that a swimming pool or splash pad for children, for example, would not be a passive use because it would be a programmed area. Mr. Conner asked if the delineated passive areas carried out into the marsh. He was concerned because dogs off leash go out into the reeds. He noted Goal 4 states “Protect the Marsh as a Resource” but he felt the marsh should have its own designation as a protected space and that it should not be used either passively or actively. Chair Blauvelt asked if the passive space designated on the map included the marsh. Recreation Director Whitley stated “no” and noted the City does not manage or maintain the marsh. Commissioner Hauser stated he thought Goal 4, “Protect the Marsh as a Resource” covered Mr. Conner’s concerns.

Mr. Conner referred to the balanced approach between passive and active uses and he asked if they want the passive, open space areas to be there for perpetuity. Chair Blauvelt stated “yes”. Commissioner Matteo stated he did not interpret the document that way and stated if they take passive space away then they have to give some back. Chair Blauvelt agreed.

Mr. Connor referred to the definition of “passive” and stated it should also include the fact that there should not be any structures, even temporary, in those spaces.

Ms. Laura Lovett, Larkspur Plaza Drive, thanked the staff and the Commission for their hard work. She agreed with Ms. McClain that the document is too specific. She noted the recently installed batting cages have created an exclusive use area that is not available to park users during the off-season when the cages are not being used. She did not think there was a balance between active and passive space and she thought the active uses have taken over the best of everything the passive space is the “leftovers”. She asked about the guidelines that would be used for making decisions about the future use of the park. She stated there should not be any Action Items but only Guiding Principles. She was concerned that the park was not senior-friendly and noted the Rose Garden Project would include a senior housing complex. She was also concerned that there was no central gathering place in the park. Commissioner Matteo asked if Ms. Lovett considered

the picnic area as a gathering place. Ms. Lovett stated “no”. She stated the President of the Friends of the Corte Madera Park sent a list with four requests: 1) Replace the invasive non-natives in the park with native plants; 2) Require permeable surfaces throughout the park as paving is replaced or added; 3) Install erosion control devices around construction disturbances; 4) Establish a setback from the marsh for any formal activities (i.e. plant with a buffer). She referred to the issue regarding active vs. passive use and stated they want to have flexibility in the future. She is not happy with the map because it indicates that sports have gotten the best areas of the park and the passive areas have gotten the “leftovers”. She did not want the dog park moved to the north end of the park.

Chair Blauvelt closed the Public Hearing.

Chair Blauvelt reiterated that the document gives them the flexibility to change things in the future.

Ms. Hill stated the Action Items are included in the Recommendations Section and were placed under the Vision and Guiding Principles Section at the direction of the Commission. They could certainly be deleted from that section. Commissioner Hauser stated the idea was to have a short summary in that section. Chair Blauvelt stated these Action Items would not necessarily happen just because they were recommended.

Commissioner Matteo stated he was always a bit uncomfortable including the Action Items under the Guiding Principles and he would like to consider deleting them from that section.

Commissioner Hauser stated he could support the document the way it was presented and did not feel it necessary to delete the Action items from that section.

Chair Blauvelt stated she could support the deletion of the Action Items from the Vision and Guiding Principles Section. The Commission agreed.

Chair Blauvelt referred to the letter from Ms. Sallyanne Wilson expressing concern about the lack of a Piper Park entrance sign on Doherty Drive. She stated it gives the appearance that the park is secondary to the Twin Cities Police Station.

Commissioner McNally asked where the sign would be located. Chair Blauvelt stated she was not sure where it could be located or what the design would be. She would leave this issue to Ms. Hill as a designer and landscape architect. She noted people do not see the “Piper Park” sign near the tennis courts. Recreation Director Whitley stated he met with the Principal of Hall Middle School and they are talking about improvements to the school that could include an electronic marquee. They are thinking of moving it closer to the entrance of Piper Park. He noted placing the “Piper Park” sign located near the tennis courts closer to the Police Station could block driver’s vision at the intersection.

Ms. Lovett suggested installing a vertical banner sign placed on poles. Ms. Hill stated that was a good idea.

Chair Blauvelt asked staff to make a strong recommendation about this signage since time was of the essence. Recreation Director Whitley stated they would need to follow the Larkspur School District timetable since the sign would probably be located on district property. Recreation Director Whitley added that the intersection of Piper Park Lane and Doherty Drive will have a traffic signal after completion of the Rose Garden Project and the signal could include a hanging directional sign.

M/s Hauser/McNally to recommend approval of the Piper Park Master Plan to the Council as amended.

Ayes: All Absent: Friedel

BUSINESS ITEM

1. Discussion of Parks and Recreation Commission responsibilities

Recreation Director Whitley presented a staff report. He asked the Commission if they thought they should be the body reviewing Heritage Tree Removal Applications.

Commissioner Matteo stated he often wondered why the Heritage Tree Ordinance was under the purview of the Parks and Recreation.

Chair Blauvelt stated she thought the more appropriate body to review these applications would be the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Hauser stated he did not think reviewing tree removal applications was a natural aspect of what the Parks and Recreation Commission should do. Chair Blauvelt agreed.

It was the consensus of the Commission that the review of Heritage Tree Ordinance applications should not be in the purview of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Commissioner McNally stated the Commission could get more involved with the series of pathways throughout the City.

RECREATION DIRECTOR'S ORAL REPORT

Recreation Director Whitley stated the brochures for the Ross Valley Summer School would be posted to the City Website the week of March 5th.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

There were no reports.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Toni DeFrancis
Recording Secretary