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PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING OF: February 25, 2020
SEBASTOPOL YOUTH ANNEX
425 MORRIS STREET

UNAPPROVED DRAFT MINUTES

PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
MINUTES OF February 25, 2020

SEBASTOPOL YOUTH ANNEX
425 MORRIS STREET

PLANNING COMMISSION:

The notice of the meeting was posted on February 20, 2020.

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

- Present:** Chair Wilson and Commissioners Fernandez, Kelley, Oetinger, Fritz, Douch*, Lindenbusch and Haug
 - Absent:** Commissioner Douch*
 - Staff:** Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director
- * Denotes partial attendance*

3. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Commissioner Kelley nominated Commissioner Fernandez for Vice Chair.

Chair Wilson asked if anyone else wished to make a nomination.

Hearing none, Chair Wilson asked for a second.

Commissioner Douch seconded the nomination of Commissioner Fernandez for Vice Chair.

Commissioner Fernandez accepted the nomination.

The Commission voted as follows:

AYES: Chair Wilson, and Commissioners Oetinger, Douch, Kelley, Fernandez, Lindenbusch and Fritz
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Commissioner Haug
ABSENT: None

The Commission agreed to have Commissioner Fernandez serve as Vice Chair until the next election of both Chair and Vice Chair occurs in April 2020 as called for in their bylaws.

4. APPROVAL OF PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES: January 28, 2020

Chair Wilson mentioned having informed staff of several clerical errors prior to the meeting.

Director Svanstrom noted clerical errors can be submitted to staff via email while substantive changes should be brought up during the meeting.

Commissioner Fritz made a motion to approve the minutes as amended.

Commissioner Oetinger seconded the motion.

Chair Wilson asked for discussion.

Hearing none, the Commission voted on the motion as follows:

AYES: Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Fernandez, and Commissioners Oetinger, Douch, Fernandez, Kelley, Lindenbusch and Fritz
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Commissioner Haug
ABSENT: None

5. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA: There were none.

6. STATEMENTS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: There were none.

7. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT (Update on Future Agendas, Action of Other Boards and City Council)

Director Svanstrom updated the Commission as follows:

- The City Council approved formation of a Design Guideline Subcommittee at their last meeting to work on Design Guideline updates.
 - The composition will include one member of the City Council (Mayor Slayter), two members from the Design Review Board and one member from the Planning Commission.
 - This item will return to the Commission at their next meeting for formal action for the Commission to nominate its own member to the subcommittee.
 - Work for the subcommittee is expected to begin in three to four months.
- Provided a status update on the City's application for an SB 2 Planning Grant.
- An additional grant opportunity has come available which the City will be applying for.
- Hotel Sebastopol has resubmitted their building permit.
 - This is their third submittal.

- They are likely to miss their March 7, 2020 deadline for their Design Review expiration. At their meeting on March 3, the Council will consider a Time Extension request of their Design Review approval.
- The Commission approved a time extension of their Use Permit late last year which will be good until October 2020.
- The City Council is the approving body due to an appeal.
- Anticipates that their building permit will be issued in the Spring.

Commissioner Kelley asked for an update on the flood measures item for The Barlow that went before the Council.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- After the flood event in 2019, The Barlow was asked to revise their Flood Management Plan which they had been working on with the City's now retired Building Official, Glenn Schainblatt.
 - A floodplain consultant assisted with the revisions.
 - The revised Flood Management Plan was presented to the Council at their last meeting.
 - Their Flood Management Plan is an operational plan and the responsibility of The Barlow's.
 - The Barlow modified some of their operational triggers for when they would begin implementation to address the problems that arose last year.
 - Council approved their revised Plan.

Commissioner Kelley asked if the City has plans with regards to the Coronavirus outbreak and the spread of it.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- The City doesn't have specific plans.
- The City is about to embark on a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) process.
 - Epidemics will be looked at as part of it.
- Sebastopol World Friends has postponed their upcoming trip to Japan due to Coronavirus.
- Can ask the Fire Chief as he oversees emergency operations.
- If an epidemic, the County's EOC would be heavily involved as they would be primary.

Vice Chair Fernandez asked if the liaison list had been finalized.

Director Svanstrom commented:

- The liaison list is used for when an item, either an appeal of a Commission decision or significant recommendation, goes to Council and a representative from the Commission would be asked to attend the meeting to answer questions or provide clarification if needed.
- If there are not scheduling conflicts it can be considered final.

Commissioner Kelley commented that she works on the Tuesday nights that she is not at Commission meetings which may make her ability to serve as a liaison impossible due to shift coverage issues.

Director Svanstrom noted the opportunity for the designated alternate or other volunteer to attend in her place if a conflict occurs.

8. CONSENT CALENDAR (PUBLIC HEARING IF REQUESTED): None

9. PUBLIC HEARING: None

10. DISCUSSION:

A. Parks Funding Discussion

Director Svanstrom presented the staff report.

The Commission asked questions of Director Svanstrom.

Director Svanstrom asked Marghe Mills-Thysen if she wished to speak.

Ms. Mills-Thysen commented:

- Serves on the Public Arts Committee.
- The Public Art Committee's working draft for the community sculpture garden was placed at the dais prior to the start of the meeting for members of the Commission.

Director Svanstrom provided a summary of the Public Arts Committee's concept for the community sculpture garden which is detailed more thoroughly in the handout.

Ms. Mills-Thysen concurred.

Ms. Mills-Thysen approached the podium and asked for questions on the draft proposal.

Commissioner Haug asked if landscaping is involved, or just concrete pads.

Ms. Mills-Thysen responded that initially it would be just the concrete pads, however, accessibility improvements would also be needed.

Commissioner Haug asked if specific art mediums were being looked at for this.

Ms. Mills-Thysen responded:

- The main emphasis is on durability, low- or no maintenance, and safety beyond a year.

Chair Wilson asked if the idea was that items would be replaced but that sculpture would always be there.

Ms. Mills-Thysen responded in the affirmative and commented:

- The Public Arts Committee normally commissions Public art pieces. Commissioned artwork is done by professional artists and there is a long vetting system.
- This proposal is different. The artwork in the community sculpture garden would be noncommissioned.
- The Public Arts Committee and City Council have approved two commissioned artwork projects in the past two years, both of which will hopefully be installed very soon.
- Noncommissioned artwork has popped up in various locations throughout town.
- The community sculpture garden would be a dedicated area where these noncommissioned artworks can be together, encouraged and maintained.
- The community sculpture garden will also become a place for people to gather to appreciate and enjoy this artwork.

Director Svanstrom outlined the proposed location for the community sculpture garden.

Commissioner Lindenbusch asked what the anticipated maintenance demands would be.

Ms. Mills-Thysen responded:

- The sculpture should be low- or no maintenance.
- The draft proposal asks the artist to maintain their own sculpture.
- The City would maintain the grounds.

Director Svanstrom added:

- The concrete pads would be poured in place and would require no maintenance.
- The grass walking areas are what would need to be maintained due to the additional foot traffic.

Ms. Mills-Thysen commented:

- The amount of funding allocated for the concrete pads is very low.
- This would provide the City with free sculpture in Ives Park and the artist a free place to display their artwork once they've been selected.
- Hearing no further questions and having no further comment to make she thanked the Commission for their time.

Chair Wilson thanked Ms. Mills-Thysen.

Director Svanstrom asked Wendy Trowbridge if she wished to speak.

Ms. Trowbridge of Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation commented:

- The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation is excited for the opportunity to work with the City at Meadowlark Field.
- The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation has done work at Meadowlark Field in the past.
- There are some invasive species issues in Meadowlark Field which they want to make sure they control so they don't take over.
- In light of the City's ordinance about the use of herbicides, they want to use some innovative ways (including mowing, grazing with sheep and densely planting native species to try and out compete the invasive species) of controlling weeds.

A member of the Commission asked Ms. Trowbridge to expound on their use of sheep for grazing.

Ms. Trowbridge responded:

- The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation works with a shepherd who rents sheep.
- They are currently doing work out at Balletto Field.
- Part of the match that the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation would bring to this project is the transport of the sheep since they'll already be in the field next door. In addition, through an internship program and other means they would bring volunteers.
- The Balletto Field project is paid for by the County of Sonoma.
- It is unlikely that the Meadowlark Field project would cost the amount that Director Svanstrom indicated in her report, the total cost should be well under that figure.

Director Svanstrom commented:

- Balletto Field is just north of Meadowlark Field.

- Moving the sheep from Balletto Field to Meadowlark Field would be easy.
- Asked Ms. Trowbridge if they used sheep on the Americorps Trail by Zimpher.

Ms. Trowbridge responded:

- They did not use sheep in that area.
- Because they couldn't use herbicides, they used a weedwhacker to control the blackberry and it works really well as long as you stay on top of it.
- Believes a 5-year commitment is necessary.

Vice Chair Fernandez asked Ms. Trowbridge if there are other strategies to remove blackberry rather than just continually cutting it back.

Ms. Trowbridge responded:

- They have tried a bunch of things when it comes to the blackberry including digging to remove the root balls.
- What they have found is that the blackberry will eventually give up after being consistently cut back for two to three years.
- The idea for Meadowlark would be to cut back the giant mass of blackberry to allow the sheep to get in and graze.

Commissioner Haug asked if the grant would be disbursed all at once or over time.

Ms. Trowbridge responded that the details are still being worked out and spoke on potential scenarios.

Commissioner Haug referred to a short extender trail from Hwy 12 to an area she indicated on a map and asked whether it could connect to Tomodachi Park.

Director Svanstrom referred to a map, explained how it could connect now and discussed potential connections.

Members of the Commission asked questions of staff and Ms. Trowbridge regarding other access-related issues at and around Highway 12, the Joe Rodota Trail and Tomodachi Park.

Commissioner Douch noted he supported staff's proposal and departed the meeting at 8:03 p.m. due to a Red Cross emergency.

Commissioner Haug commented:

- Walked along Morris Street and had a very difficult time finding the entrance to the Americorps Trail.
- We have a lot of incredible community resources that are very hard to locate.
- Morris Street should be a gateway to our parks.
- Suggested that there be key identifying features that welcome people into these incredible resources.

Ms. Trowbridge responded:

- That was called out as part of the Master Plan.
- There is a lot of signage that is mismatched.
- A lot of the mismatched signage has to do with various grants and their requirements.
- The Plan calls for more arches to emphasize entry points and for a unified look and feel in terms of signage for the Laguna.

Director Svanstrom added:

- The Ag + Open Space Americorps Trail Grant that the City is working on now to extend the Americorps Trail down to Highway 12 will have an arbor marking the entry at Highway 12 and at the entry off Morris and at the northern side.
- Agreed with Ms. Trowbridge on the wayfinding signage as well.

Ms. Trowbridge commented:

- The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation has been working on blackberry control on the Americorps Trail.
- The blackberry on the Americorps Trail made it feel very unsafe to her.
- The City has given the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation funds on a yearly basis to continue work on moving the blackberry back and create something where the Police Department can gain access with their vehicles due to the homeless encampment issues in the area.
- Things have improved since this work has been done.

Commissioner Haug asked if it would be possible to post 'No Parking' signs on the east side of Morris Street and place a wide bike lane there instead to make the area more inviting.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- One of the issues with that may be that there are businesses on both sides of Morris Street, and they do utilize those parking spaces.
- The area is zoned industrial on both sides of the street.
- There have not been thoughts about widening the sidewalk there as it meets specs and standards for that type of road.
- The idea of walking along the west side of the Laguna channel is where the Americorps Trail Extension Project came from.

Commissioner Haug commented:

- For many people and visitors who aren't familiar with these trails, an open sightline along the Laguna with clear signage and entrance points would draw people in.
- Also, she has seen people jogging down the middle of Morris Street rather than using the sidewalk which leaves her with the impression that the sidewalk in that location isn't inviting to them.
- There seems to be ample parking at The Barlow, Community Center and at the industrial complexes.

Chair Wilson thanked Ms. Trowbridge.

Chair Wilson opened the public hearing.

Ms. Mills-Thysen commented:

- Asked Ms. Trowbridge if they'd considered the use of goats in addition to sheep.
- Was a previous member of the Redwood Empire Dairy Goat Association.
- Goats are also rented out for grazing.
- Both could be used.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- As she understands it, based on past discussions with Ms. Trowbridge, the issue with goats is that they eat everything, including trees and the native plants that they're trying to restore.
- They have found sheep to be the most successful.

Ms. Trowbridge concurred.

Director Svanstrom commented that the trails would be open when the sheep are out grazing which could have the potential to become a fun community engagement and ecological education opportunity.

Hearing nothing further, Chair Wilson closed the public comment period.

Chair Wilson asked for comments from the Commission.

Chair Wilson asked if staff has discussed the placards on the little league fence with the folks at Sebastopol Little League.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- She had not although she recalled that her predecessor and other City staff had some time ago.
- The placards are an important part of their sponsorship and fundraising which allows them to keep costs down for the kids.
- Some smaller improvements that the Commission identified such as LED lighting upgrades, hedge removal, and painting some of the light standards from galvanized to black have been done out of the maintenance budget.

Chair Wilson commented:

- Encouraged additional discussion with Sebastopol Little League as the little league field comprises a large portion of Ives Park which is largely inaccessible to the public.
- In addition, the little league field is locked, and the agreement says it's supposed to be open.
- The Ives Park Master Plan never studied incorporating the little league field into the park itself.
 - The author of the Ives Park Master Plan considered it an existing condition and did not incorporate it.
- In favor of little league but is also in favor of a more robust vision for Ives Park which is currently quite cramped with the little league field being locked.
- Would like to see a vision for Ives Park that is greater than the existing area and perhaps even include the little league field somehow.
- Sebastopol has three other ball fields within town.
- Having a robust little league isn't inconsistent with having an improved Ives Park.
- There seems to be an unwillingness to study that issue.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- Recalls Chair Wilson having brought this issue up before.
- If there is consensus to look at revising the Master Plan to look at the issue of the Little League field or other issues, staff could bring it before Council to see if that is something that they'd be open to.
- The Chair and any member of the Commission can request that this item come back as a discussion item to see if this is something the Commission would want to make a recommendation to Council about.

Chair Wilson commented:

- The idea of using sheep is terrific.
- Not only is the Laguna area a park and recreational area, it is a big firebreak for the City as well.
- Keeping vegetation controlled is a terrific idea for a lot of reasons.

Vice Chair Fernandez commented:

- Has brought up before and hopes Sebastopol Little League will consider the use of see through signage so people can see in from the backside of the little league field.
 - When looking out from inside the little league field the signage itself would be visible.
- Asked if there was a sense of how the user fees stack up against the amount of resources that are needed when an event is held at a public park.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- The City is doing a User Fee Study and a Development Impact Fee Study.
- This is the first time in the City's history that a professional consultant has been hired to do this.
- The Development Impact Fee is expected to come to the Commission in April as a discussion item before it goes to Council as a discussion item before it goes for formal hearing.
- The User Fee component of it related to park fees is something she is planning on bringing to the Commission as a discussion item.
- The fees we charge aren't full cost recovery in terms of recouping the various costs.
- The City also sponsors events and waives certain fees.
- The professional User Fee Study will look at what the actual costs are versus the fees.
- It is up to the City to set the policy in terms of full cost recovery or not.
- There are different ways to structure fees which the professional will be looking at.
- The study will be coming to the Commission soon.

Vice Chair Fernandez commented:

- Interested in knowing about the maintenance that is required for the various parks, trails, and other areas in town.
 - This would include resources required, how much are they maintained, if there are a lack of resources to maintain them, costs, etc.
- Asked for an update on the Luther Burbank Gold Ridge Experiment Farm in terms of any needs it may have.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- One of the needs is the restroom which has already been funded.
- Has not looked at it closely in terms of additional needs it may have.
- Can follow up to see what needs they have.

Vice Chair Fernandez asked Director Svanstrom about the process for updating the signage at Spooner Park.

Director Svanstrom responded that the City doesn't have a specific policy on that issue although it has been identified as a need.

Vice Chair Fernandez asked about the idea of removing or reducing the amount of perimeter parking at the Plaza to allow for enlargement of the Plaza, in particular he asked if there would be a surplus of parking once Hotel Sebastopol is constructed.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- Parking for Hotel Sebastopol would be at Brown Street and Depot Street and their parking lot will not be open to the public.

- The street parking along Main Street fronting the hotel project is not proposed to change.
- There will be some parking along Depot Street.

Vice Chair Fernandez asked about the use of the portion of the parking lot that belongs to the City in between the cinema and across the street from Whole Foods.

Director Svanstrom responded that she could look into that.

Commissioner Haug, Chair Fritz and Director Svanstrom discussed funding and potential grant opportunities for the Ives Park Master Plan.

Commissioner Haug commented:

- Having a crosswalk at Willow Street and Jewell Avenue would immediately improve the park experience for its users.
- The crosswalk on Willow Street that leads to a dead end rather than leading to the steps to the pool would also improve the park experience for its users.
- Dislikes the chain link fence that is used at Ives Park.
- Replacing the chain link fence with wood would yield immediate public benefit.
- Due to the financial constraints, creek naturalization seems like a low priority.
- The City's park budget is quite small to manage the various park areas that we have here.
- Our parks are amazing community assets.
- The projects that the City funds should relate to what will benefit the general public the most.

Chair Wilson asked if the chain link fence would remain once the creek is naturalized.

Director Svanstrom responded that the concept would be to naturalize the creek so that the fencing can be removed.

Chair Wilson commented:

- Commissioner Haug raised several good points about Ives Park.
- Requested that discussion of Ives Park come back to the Commission as its own agenda item within the next month or two.
- Has issues with the Ives Park Master Plan.
- Funding is an obvious issue.

Director Svanstrom responded in the affirmative.

Vice Chair Fernandez commented:

- Considerations such as repairs when the Master Plan calls for replacement or removal, etc. are also important to keep in mind.

Director Svanstrom responded:

- Concurred with Vice Chair Fernandez on that being an important part of the conversation.
- Fencing is about \$10 per linear foot.
- The fencing can be replaced without naturalizing the creek, but it cannot be removed altogether.

Chair Wilson commented:

- Spoke on the City of Santa Rosa's Prince Memorial Greenway and suggested that staff reach out to them on their process in terms of grants, etc.

- Believes there are a lot more grants available for opening waterways.
- Reiterated his request for a specific agenda item to continue their discussion of Ives Park within the next month or two.
- It's important to have a realistic and broad vision for these parks, especially Ives Park.
- It is good to have a Master Plan and then to phase it realistically.
- Optimistic on funding prospects.
- It sounds like Commissioner Haug doesn't think that naturalizing the creek would be money well spent.
- The Commission should discuss this further.

Commissioner Haug responded that it's not about money being well spent, it's about actually having the money to spend.

Chair Wilson suggested that the Commission meet at Ives Park and take a tour to discuss this as part of a regular agenda.

Commissioner Fritz recalled the Commission having previously taken a walking tour of Ives Park with the former Planning Director and current Superintendent of Public Works to discuss this matter and noted that several members of the Commission have come and gone since that time. He added that it would be good to do it again with the members who were not involved before as well as the current Planning Director.

Director Svanstrom responded in the affirmative and commented that timing for that would most likely be in April or later.

Commissioner Fritz commented:

- Likes the idea of spending a good portion of the money on Ives Park because it is very needed.
- The chain link fence at Ives Park bothers him as well.
- There is a locked gate to a nice lawn area at Ives Park which he has been asking about for years.
 - The response he has received from the City Manager/City Attorney is that the City's liability insurance policy doesn't allow it to be unlocked because it floods in the wintertime which doesn't make sense because the Laguna floods a lot more and it's not fenced in.
 - Would love to be able to open that gate so people can sit by the creek and enjoy a picnic.
- Loves the idea of the connection to Meadowlark Field from Highway 12.

Commissioner Lindenbusch commented:

- Our User Fees seem very low, especially given that it includes the use of City-owned property like the Community Center and the Garzot Community Building in Libby Park.
- The Garzot Community Building in Libby Park is extremely underutilized.
- Wants to support the Community Center in the ways they need to have a functioning website.
- The City's website, in terms of how it presents parks could be improved.
- Suggested relying on community engagement strategies to reach out to photographers in our community who have taken some astounding photographs to be able to better represent our city.
- The City should have a conversation with the Chamber of Commerce about how they represent our parks as well.

- While there may not always be a clear mechanism for doing so, it's good to make sure that everybody's on the same page.
- Representing our parks more effectively could lead to increased usage and revenue.
- As somebody who was recently appointed to the Planning Commission, he did not realize that he would also be serving as a Parks Commissioner.
 - That should be added to the formal description of the Planning Commission to help people understand what they're signing up for.
- The City could better advertise that our plaza is the, 'Mario Savio Free Speech Plaza'.
- While not popular amongst all, it may be a good idea to think about metered parking.
- Because the City doesn't have adequate revenue to support implementation of a Master Plan for a park as important as Ives, the City needs to be thinking about revenue sources.
- An urgent recommendation he would give to the Council for funding our parks, after learning some about impact fees, would be to build some housing.
- The Council should look into the urgent priority of building housing, not just to improve housing in the midst of a crisis for our region, but also for the positive impact it can have on our parks.
- Communications are important for expanding revenue and also for expanding interest in our parks.

Director Svanstrom asked for a consensus from the Commission on this item as presented as it will be moving on to the Budget Subcommittee next.

Chair Wilson expressed being agreeable to it as presented.

Members of the Commission concurred.

Director Svanstrom asked the Commission if they had any additional priorities that they could think of at this time that were not identified in the staff report, she noted that the Commission could email her with any they may have outside of this meeting.

Hearing nothing further, Chair Wilson concluded discussion of this matter.

11. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS: None

12. ADJOURNMENT: Chair Wilson adjourned the meeting at 8:50 p.m. The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, at 7:00 p.m. at the Sebastopol Youth Annex, 425 Morris Street, Sebastopol, CA 95472.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Kari Svanstrom
Planning Director