



City of Sebastopol
Incorporated 1902
Planning Department
7120 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol, CA 95472
707-823-6167
707-823-1135 (Fax)

www.ci.sebastopol.ca.us

Email: kvanstrom@cityofsebastopol.org

PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING OF: October 13, 2020

UNAPPROVED DRAFT MINUTES

PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
MINUTES OF October 27, 2020, Special Meeting

PLANNING COMMISSION:

The notice of the meeting was posted on October 22, 2020.

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Fernandez called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and read an opening statement.

2. ROLL CALL:

Present: Chair Fernandez, Vice Chair Fritz, and Commissioners Douch, Kelley, Lindenbusch, Wilson, and Haug
Absent: Commissioner Oetinger
Staff: Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director
Dante Del Prete, Public Works Superintendent

3. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA: None.

4. STATEMENTS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: None.

5. DISCUSSION:

A. IVES PARK IMPROVEMENTS/MAINTENANCE DISCUSSION

Director Svanstrom thanked Commission Haug for bringing forward this agenda item and for helping to coordinate it, provided a brief introduction and introduced Superintendent of Public Works, Dante Del Prete.

Superintendent Del Prete presented and was available for questions.

Chair Fernandez thanked Superintendent Del Prete for being present and asked for questions of staff from the Commission.

Linda Kelley, Planning Commissioner

I do not know if this is the right time to ask about the ball field and its history of uses?

Dante Del Prete, Superintendent of Public Works

I can elaborate on what I know; Sebastopol Little League does lease the ball field. I know there was questions, concerns, and maybe some wanting of opening that fence to open up the park. Unfortunately, Little League changes their leadership group as the kids go through quickly, some quicker than others, so the board changes. Due to COVID, they do not have a lot of leadership there right now. I am doing my best to address maintenance through Little League. The use is generally allowed through Little League. During Apple Blossom, Public Works would roll back the fence so the Apple Blossom Festival could utilize the outfield for part of their event. Unfortunately, one year, it rained very heavily, and the outfield got severely damaged, after which Little League shied away from wanting to grant that use, at least for vehicle access. There has been modified use back and forth. Generally, Little League pays for all the maintenance within the fence. Because of that, they decide what activities go on their field. The City can get involved and make some recommendations, but in the past, historically, it has been an agreement through Little League.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

You mentioned the bathrooms at the youth park, are they just closed when there is nothing going on? Whose decision is that and is it day and night that they are closed, or only when games are there, how is that set up?

Dante Del Prete, Superintendent of Public Works

They are included as part of the Little League lease; they are part of the baseball field and the concession stand. They were flooded significantly, about 6' high, and Little League coordinated and facilitated all the repairs. They do maintain and kind of take on ownership of that facility. This has been a topic for a long time. It is called a youth park, but we do not have facilities for youth to use it. Along the same conversation as the wants and needs for a restroom up at Burbank Experiment Farm. I would also love to see a restroom built for Laguna Youth Park, the one that is in place now cannot be used because it would have to be completely demolished. It is not ADA accessible and would not be able to accommodate it, even if I looked at turning it into a single restroom rather than two separate ones. It would still be too hard to accommodate ADA for that facility.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

I have a question that has to do with an item on our next agenda, which is regarding hazard mitigation. Has any thought been given in terms of protection from hazards, such as fires, for Ives Park, or any of our other parks? We can come back to that unless you have a quick comment now.

Dante Del Prete, Superintendent of Public Works

The one thing we do for hazard mitigation, particularly with fires, is we get ahead of making sure we clean the gutters so they're not full of dry leaves, and that's something we do periodically throughout the year. We start that early for our buildings and facilities because if there are embers that fly around, even in a park that has normal irrigation, those dry leaves

and those gutters would be quick to start a building on fire. As far as any sort of mitigation for fire hazard within the parks, again, most of them have irrigation. The trees are normally spaced far enough apart to where they generally would not jump from tree to tree. As far as the Laguna Preserve, we have had fires out there, we have had homeless encampment fires take hold a few times. The fire department has been excellent about getting out there. There are some access issues. After we get the first substantial rain, we cannot get a vehicle past the one section if you go from the east, or the Chevron Station side is what we call it. Unfortunately, we have vehicle access at the gate by the Chevron Station once the area is dry but there is a bridge that goes through the wetlands, the pedestrian bridge, and once we get a substantial rain we can't get a vehicle through there. The whole reason we need to pull out the floating bridge so soon is because any substantial rain and that bridge is stuck out there, because that is the access, we must get it out. The fire department has been great. We do have a four-wheeler and a small trailer that will go across the floating bridge when it is in to provide emergency rescue and or maintenance. If we had to get through that, we do have that at the Corp Yard.

Chair Fernandez asked if members of the public wished to speak on this item.

Lynn Deedler

I just wanted to ask Superintendent Del Prete a question, or the Commission. Recently, the hedge between the Center for the Arts building and the kids play area was removed. That is kind of like a historic attraction in the park, you could walk by that hedge and see how the branches were polished by generations of kids that have been playing in there, playing hide and seek, and different kinds of climbing games going through those plants, my kids played in them, my grandkids played in them, and when I've been out in the park, you see other kids playing in them, and now they're gone. I am sure it had something to do with security, but what is the balance of stripping all that exterior away from the park, and keeping it like a park? I have no further questions, just statements. I found a letter saying that there's fundamental problems with the current plan. The most significant one is moving the kids play area next to a busy street where there's limited parking which is away from the bathrooms with no shade is something that is being totally overlooked. The community in general thinks the current play area in those aspects is great. When you move it back it shifts a lot of other things and I think that is an essential thing to be worked out. One of the things that it shifts is undergrounding a portion to creek that is sort of between there and the stage, for reasons that aren't clear, but I think in the long-term planning of what you're going to do, those issues should be resolved.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

Hearing nothing further, Chair Fernandez closed public comment and asked Superintendent Del Prete to address the comments and questions raised by Mr. Deedler.

Dante Del Prete, Superintendent of Public Works

As far as the hedge, I have been here for 25 years and I remember when that cypress hedge went all the way around the park. A lot of kids did play in it. The cypress is supposed to be a tree and it is not something that is supposed to be hedged back so over time that wood did get infested and decay, so we had sections die out. There was concern with fire hazard and security as well. I do not want to use the word attractive nuisance, because it was an attractive hedge. I would agree with Mr. Deedler on that and some aspects because the kids did go there and play. Unfortunately, trees are not really intended to be a play structure in a city park. We had bottles and other types of things that that were an issue within that area. At the time, in early 2017 with former Director Webster, the request was to finish removing that hedge, to

open it up and have it feel more safe and not hidden, to have it be included to where the Art Center and the park melded into one property and try and make it a more inclusive community area. Events at the Art Center could bleed into the park and vice versa. Mr. Deedler, I do absolutely remember kids playing in there, and I know kids had a lot of fun in that hedge. We did replace 90% of it several years ago and this was the last section that we removed recently.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

Regarding moving the bathrooms, that's part of the Master Plan, we are not quite there yet, but Mr. Deedler's point is well taken on that. In the time we have remaining, I want to make sure we get an opportunity to discuss some of the priorities. Superintendent Del Prete already talked about some of the items we had mentioned when we did our walkthrough that are being addressed, or being taken care of, but there may be other areas on there. I think we can just kind of open it up for Commissioners, if you want to make a comment, if you have priorities you think would be items to consider, and kind of take it from there.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

My big thing was it looks a bit ragged. I think a large part of the raggedness is the asphalt, the asphalt is largely in poor condition and there is a lot of it. The plan that was brought to us a couple months ago, when we looked at the proposed reconfiguration of some of the pathways and redoing the asphalt, I'm in favor of that because I really think that the current condition of the asphalt is just not acceptable. If there is a plan for that, and budget for that, I am in favor of taking care of that because I think it will look better, even if it's just asphalt and not a nicer material, I just think newer asphalt is going to look and function so much better, it will get rid of the tripping hazards and will be accessible and all of that so I am in favor of that. The chain link fence is horrible, and we all know that. I hear what Superintendent Del Prete is saying about how much do we spend fixing the fence when we know that we eventually want to get rid of it. Parts of it look bad and I would be in favor of repairing where we can because I think it's going to be a long time before that fence really does go away. Unless we get some kind of grant that lets us spend a bunch of money on fencing because there's just so much fencing at Ives Park that it would be nice to what is there being in somewhat decent condition at least. The thing that I always rant about and is allowing access to that nice grassy area next to the creek, it is just so tempting. Looking over the chain link fence at this nice, perfect little picnic area next to the creek but you cannot go there. I know it has been explained to me the reasons why we cannot do that but I, for the life of me, still do not really understand why. There are bodies of water and parks all over the country that people can go have picnics next to, I am not sure why this area is considered so hazardous, why we can't let people in there. I would love to see that changed. I appreciate the ongoing picnic table replacement, some of those older picnic tables seem to be going away and we are getting new plastic and metal tables and benches. I think that is good. I am looking forward to seeing the trash cans being replaced because there are some trash cans that are in pretty sad shape. That is my initial take on some of the priorities I see for the next couple years with regards to maintenance.

Linda Kelley, Planning Commissioner

I appreciate all the comments being forwarded on. Following up around the ball field, is it a multi-use, do the proprietors allow other kinds of sports there in terms of uses that would be appropriate for that size area? Is it going to be too much discord to try and open that up entirely and relocate that use maybe over by the Community Center?

Patrick Wilson, Commissioner

I agree with Commissioner Fritz. Regarding the ball field, Director Svanstrom sent me the agreement a while back, and maybe she could circulate it to the rest of the Commission at some point? It is not really a lease; it is just a short-term agreement that can be terminated by either side on very short notice. The Little League doesn't pay anything to the City for it, and as I recall that agreement says that the Little League is supposed to allow other people to use the area when the Little League isn't using it. The Master Plan consultant from five years ago in that report, noted that it was locked. In all the years I have seen the field, it has always been locked, and that is contrary to the agreement with the City. Although the consultant in his report said that he talked to someone at the City and it was unclear if the City had embraced that, despite what the agreement says. I also agree with what Commissioner Kelley said, and I've made this point before so I won't keep repeating it, but we have at least three other ball fields in town, two near the Community Center and one at Ragle Park. In addition, there are ball fields at the schools that can be used under the Civic Center Act. It's not like this is the only field and I think it would be useful at some point to get someone from the Little League to come before the Commission and tell us what's going on, what their plans are, can they use other facilities, how often do they use it, and that kind of thing. If you look at the usable area of the park, the ball field comprises a significant portion of the usable area, and it is just walled off. I have said before, and I still think that that ought to be looked at.

Zac Douch, Commissioner

I agree with Commissioner Fritz and many of the suggestions. I think the priorities for maintenance at this point really are, as felt, preparing where we can, I think removing some of it may be an easier fix, certainly in the rose garden, and there's some areas where it's so degraded, it might as well be taken out and some topsoil put in. I think there's several areas that could happen, or even just cut it back to increase the planting areas would be a fairly inexpensive maintenance type item, and is one of the few items that really hasn't been significantly worked on since the last time we looked at this in 2017. That said, I see so many of the things we talked about then have been done, so that is great to see.

With the ball fields, there was quite a lot of discussion in 2017 about the issue of usage, but also the issue of visual obstruction, and there was talk about trying to remove some of the signage on the south side of the ball field so you can at least get the visual look into the ball field, which is nice to be able to look into, and the signage can be moved to the north fence fairly easily. It could still be a revenue source for the Little League. Having that unlocked would be a great thing. I remember the discussion about the damage that had happened and the difficulty that had caused the Little League.

The other big issue, as Vice Chair Fritz pointed out, is the fencing. When we had a hearing in 2017, on my list of priorities was replacing sections of the chain link with perhaps a black chain link, which are much less visually obtrusive. There was not a lot of agreement because the attitude was that a chain link fence is a chain link fence. That said, three years later, it has not gotten any better, obviously. What would be lovely is to replace it with some combination of a post and rail fence, maybe the chain link behind it so it is visually appealing. That is something that if we did then end up removing the fencing, it could be reused elsewhere. As I was walking in there recently, that was where my mind went, if we could even just replace and or dress up that with post and rail and chain link combination as necessary to create the barrier that's needed, I think that would be a huge improvement. Once we get past those items, we're into the improvements that we listed in 2017, which I think still stand up in the priority list that we had back then, I think it's still very relevant, so I won't get into that, but I think that stays relevant for improvements.

Kate Haug, Commissioner

Thank you to all the commissioners for going to the park and revisiting these lists. I appreciate that since I kind of initiated that. From my experience of being in the park, making the list, reading the staff report from 2017, and listening to Superintendent Del Prete's report, a couple of things come to mind. Also, given the extremely limited resources that we have currently available to us, one of the ideas that I think is important is ways that we can work in tandem with maintenance to get as much bang for the buck as we can get. For instance, it would be nice to come back once the asphalt plan is completed by the consultants that are preparing to do the work to look at it and make sure that it reflects our discussion this evening, such as Commissioner Douch's comments about removing some of the asphalt.

When I was in the park, I was looking at the stage area to the west of Ives Pool and I was thinking it would be really lovely for us to figure out a way to define that area as a town square type area. In my proposal, I sent a link to the architects that did the Noe Valley Town Square. It seems like if we are removing the asphalt and redoing the area, we might be able to simply define that more as a square with some simple pavers. I was just wondering if it is possible to try to think of ways that if you are already ripping something up and laying something else down, if you can create a more maximum user benefit from that.

I also really agree about the fencing and I would love to get a price for how much it would be. Especially around the children's playground, a chain link fence around the playground just seems kind of arcane and reminds me of a prison. I would also like to see the playground open to that grassy field. Even if we could just remove the chain link fence and create a more visual opening to the grassy field that's adjacent to the children's playground, because I never see children in the grassy field, but in my whole life as a parent and going to tons of parks, usually, if you have a play structure in a field, the kids go back and forth from it. When I was walking, I saw a lot of use of the park by families. I was wondering if there are more play structure opportunities possible in the park. I know we have limited time tonight, but I'm hoping that if we're able to continue this, that we could develop a survey for the public to take maybe in January or February about how they use Ives Park and what small improvements would enhance their user experience. I also feel like the bathrooms could be upgraded. Chair Fernandez noted that there are some holes in the side of the building, which I assume is some form of vandalism. If there's a way that we can keep upgrading the bathrooms, I know it's probably hard to maintain them because it seems like they get a lot of use, but I'm looking into that as another small, hopefully affordable improvement. I feel in this discussion, what I'm hearing about the ball field is that the Little League is taking on the maintenance and care of the ball field, and because of our limited resources and limited staffing, that might be a benefit to the maintenance department. If there is community interest to use that field, are the people who are interested in using it also interested in helping to maintain it? There may be a way to facilitate partnerships. If people are using it, they may also contribute to its maintenance instead of just leaving it to the Little League to be responsible for maintenance.

The last thing about the creek is, I have seen several children climb over the fence when I've been in Ives Park. The other question I have about that is, we have the Laguna where there's water and there's no fencing around it, we obviously live close to the Pacific Ocean, and there's no fence around the ocean, so I'm not sure there is a liability issue. Given where we live, and that there are many different bodies of water all around us that are much larger and much more threatening in some way if you can't swim, it seems like we should be able to rethink the fencing, maybe it's a bit of overkill, I don't know, but I just really feel like the fence is a huge deterrent. In the Master Plan, they have the removal of the hedge along Jewell. I would like more visibility. When I go to Willard Libby Park, I like the way it is so open, you can

really see through to the whole park, there is good visual connectedness. My final comment is that I do feel like we can put in a crosswalk at Jewell and Willow, but I know that that we need to talk to the traffic person about the crosswalks so I will save that for another time.

Luke Lindenbusch, Commissioner

In interest of time and just for the public to be able to go to the next meeting, which is also very important, I will keep it very brief, especially since we are continuing this item. I did a walking tour as well. I have a handful of points to bring up about maintenance that I would love to bring up at the next meeting. I would continue to advocate the prioritization of numbers 25 and 27 which center around that corner at Willow and Jewell, and as has been noted, has a lot of different opportunities for community engagement, some stopgap fixes that don't take too much money, and I think that's something we should be thinking about a lot more when it comes to Ives Park. The Public Works Department really has some strong and good priorities and is executing them well, in terms of the delivery of the vision of the Ives Park Master Plan.

We can really add value is by increasing community engagement and figuring out the more gargantuan tasks and how we can accomplish them with pretty low resources, as has been brought up by Commissioner Fritz and others, there are different elements of tactical urbanism that can be applied to creating a temporary plaza, that cannot really jazz up a chain link fence if you just had some painted plastic slats. Those are ways where you can get some community buy in to. As we're looking to the next meeting, I think we should be thinking about the formation of the subcommittee, I had been tapped to spearhead that, but didn't proceed as I had received interest from a total of four commissioners, which would be out of compliance with the Brown Act. We need to think about who wants to be part of that subcommittee, what crossover it might be able to have with the Public Arts Committee, especially as this pertains a lot to some of the developments around the Vets building. Also, looking beyond the development of a foundation as the primary goal of such a subcommittee, and maybe it is just an Ives Park improvement subcommittee since that is what we seem to have landed on. This might not be the best time to be looking at the development of a Parks Foundation, just with the economic situation that we are dealing with. With that, I will leave it to the next meeting. Thank you all very much again.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

I will save most of my comments for the next meeting. The slats that are on the west side of Ives, near the stage, could be painted into a design, I think that would spruce things up there. Superintendent Del Prete, would you be available to do something similar again for a future meeting?

Dante Del Prete, Superintendent of Public Works

Certainly, I can make myself available. I took notes and I can work with Director Svanstrom to try and address some of those via email as well if that is helpful.

Evert Fernandez, Chair

Thank you, I really appreciate you being here and your time and everything that you do.

9. ADJOURNMENT: Chair Fernandez adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m. The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting will take place on Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Kari Svanstrom
Planning Director