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Leigh Creekside Park is as controversial as ever

By Pippa Fisher



Leigh Creekside Park Photo Pippa Fisher

More than 50 meetings later, the controversy around Leigh Creekside Park remains as acrimonious as ever with many residents questioning the fairness of the focused Environmental Impact Report.

The Lafayette City Council heard a status update at the meeting July 26 from Parks, Trails and Recreation Director Jonathan Katayanagi, who said that the focused EIR that city staff had been ordered to prepare at the February meeting would begin in July. The results of this EIR, focused solely on noise, should be available in early 2018. The city is working with the environmental consultants PlaceWorks.

During the February meeting, the council approved the development of the controversial play structure to be built subject to the results of the focused EIR, against the wishes of those residents who prefer the park to

remain "passive" - left in its natural state which is what they claim was intended all along for that parcel of land.

On the opposite side are those who want a play structure; who want a more "active" park.

And, several years since the first meetings about this, both sides are still as divided as ever.

The "passives" argued that the city has ignored a glaring need for complete environmental review by opting for the narrow EIR. They say that many areas need further study, including traffic, parking, damage to tree roots, soil compaction, loss of habitat for birds and other wildlife, including the endangered western pond turtle and California red-legged frog.

One speaker, among the several that urged the council to look for creative alternatives, suggested building a "tot lot" by the gazebo on Mount Diablo Boulevard where he said there would be less environmental damage since the area has already been covered with concrete.

Lafayette resident and lead proponent for the play structure, Grace Dixon, did not agree. She said that the gazebo area was too close to Mount Diablo Boulevard. She said what Leigh Creekside Park is currently lacking is kids and what it needs is something to draw kids in.

Council Member Ivor Samson noted that there were many questions about the fairness of the process. He said the fact-based comments from area residents constitute "fair argument," which he said, "we ignore at our peril." He said there was significant risk of litigation, but that even beyond that, it is "not the way Lafayette does business."

Samson went on to say that many people in the community are concerned the council is not looking at this objectively.

Although this item was only on the agenda in the form of an update, with no action to be taken, Vice Mayor Don Tatzin and Samson both said they would be putting it back on the agenda at a future date.

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