

A New Master Plan for Lafayette Parks

By Jean Follmer

Lafayette (the City) is in the initial stages of implementing a New Master Plan (the Plan) for its parks and the City wants your input. Parks can include both neighborhood parks with little or no parking and community parks with parking lots. Additionally, parks can be classified as either active or passive and many parks include both spaces. For example, the neighborhood Brook Street Park is active because it includes play equipment and picnic facilities. The neighborhood Mildred Lane Park is passive because it consists of a bench and native landscaping. Community parks such as the Lafayette Community Park and Lafayette Community Center are larger (with both active and passive spaces) and offer recreational facilities such as baseball and soccer fields, a multi-sport rink, play areas, a Petanque court and recreation classrooms. The City currently has 88.8 acres of park land at 6 locations and the Lafayette Community Park accounts for 68 of those acres.

Lafayette citizens have indicated they are satisfied with the offerings of the Community Center. As a self-sustaining (non-subsidized) entity, the Community Center has weathered many recessions by “offering well-priced and diverse activities” says Lafayette Parks and Recreation Director, Jennifer Russell. The City of Moraga recently opted out of an agreement with Lafayette and took its fee classes in-house. Even with the change, Russell said “the preliminary (end of year) numbers are looking comparable.”

While the citizens of Lafayette have also indicated a satisfaction with the Community Park and feel that “existing parks are generally complete,” the City does not have enough sports fields to meet demand. Further, the citizens desire more neighborhood parks and there is a strong interest in adding a dog park. Finally, there is no parkland at all on the north side of the City.

What to do? Jennifer Russell says, “We have a huge challenge before us because Lafayette has been built out for so long” there just isn’t much land available for new parks. Many home tracts were built before being annexed by the City, so parks weren’t originally contemplated. Russell says “Newer communities are being built with parks

in mind.” Add to that the exorbitant price of land in the area; securing additional park acres is not easily done. The dollars just aren’t there.

One might ask where our tax dollars go and how they are allocated. Those questions are answered in a six-minute video on the City’s website called “Municipal Finance 101” featuring City Manager Steve Falk. It all comes down to different “buckets” and only certain things can be legally paid out of each bucket. In the case of parks, funding is available from three potential sources: dedication/improvement fees on new construction, state grants or donations and user fees which “offset operations and maintenance costs.”

The Plan is in the public outreach and participation stage. The first of several public input meetings was held recently at the Lafayette Community Center and the upcoming Winter Recreation Guide will also ask for comments. According to Russell, “It’s hard to get people to voice their opinions.” She encourages citizens to contact her directly with their questions, concerns and ideas. Russell offered the reminder that the Plan is “in its infancy”, thus your voice will be heard. The City wants to know if there is a need for park facilities/services in your neighborhood.



Jennifer Russell, Lafayette Parks & Recreation Director
Photo Jean Follmer

