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## Should Rancho Laguna Park Stay Untouched?

By *Sophie Braccini*

"We have a beautiful park, why fix what is not broken?" asked Diane Renton at the Town Council meeting on the evening of September 14. Her statement was echoed by about 20 Lamorinda residents who came in protest of a plan by Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram to hire a consultant to re-think the design of Rancho Laguna Park to include sports fields and a dedicated dog park. Most of the people who spoke urged the Council not to spend \$7,000 on a study. The Council, wanting to see a park design where dogs and playgrounds would be physically separated, approved the spending with a requirement than an option that did not include sports fields also be studied.

"Callander (the consultant) was asked to consider a design that could accommodate a three acre dog park and a 'U-12' (50 x100 yards) soccer field within existing park boundaries," stated the staff report presented by Ingram. That sentence and preliminary drawings that proposed a separate dog park led many residents to believe that the Town had decided to try to do away with the present multi-use park where, depending on the hour, dogs, sports teams, families and community groups all share the same grass. Opponents came from all strata of the population.

"I am not a dog owner or a soccer player," said former mayor, Parks Foundation and Parks and Recreation Commission member Cherie Grant who revisited the history of the park for the benefit of the Council, "this is a rustic park, made for inclusive multi-generational use. Over the past 20 years it was always decided not to use it as a sports facility because of limited parking and remoteness in case of emergency."

Other opposed to planning for sports fields indicated that it would be too expensive to amend the park. "The slope of the park would not allow proper soccer fields," said Steve Smith, a builder and sports coach, "it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to grade the park and insure proper drainage."

Many residents just expressed their love for the park as it is, "Rancho Laguna is the nearest thing to heaven I've seen on a public property," said Doug Home, the father of three and dog owner, "don't waste a dime on a study."

Finally, members of the organization Lamorinda Dogs, who will present their plan for the park in the near future, felt they had been undercut. "Entering an agreement with a designer before seeing our proposal does not make sense," said Jeanne Moreau. Bill Carman added that it would seem fairer to look at their ideas before hiring someone else.

Members of the Eclipse Soccer Club, a new elite soccer club in Moraga, spoke in favor of hiring a consultant. They already use the park for practices, but will have to stop when the sun goes down earlier and Rancho Laguna becomes an off-leash park at 4:00 p.m.

In proposing that a consultant be hired but that a proposal that included no sports fields at all should also be evaluated, Council Member Dave Trotter noted, "I think this is probably going to be the least expensive alternative."

The Council reminded the audience that its initial request to the Parks and Recreation Commission was to find a way to physically separate the playgrounds from the off-leash dogs and that getting professional designs to achieve that result, including the cost of each option, was a good idea.

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[back](#)

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