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Rancho Laguna Park Layout Nearly Decided

By Cathy Tyson

Approximately forty people crowded into the Mosaic room of the Hacienda de las Flores for a workshop to discuss and plan the future layout of Rancho Laguna Park recently. In a process that has dragged on for years, the Parks and Recreation Commission was looking to formulate a recommendation to the Town Council which will meet on October 26 to give a final decision on the matter.

Jay Ingram, Parks and Recreation Director, reports that the Commission will recommend to the Town Council a two phased approach for spatial separation at Rancho Laguna Park, "Phase one: complete the south side playground renovation, including fencing, as well as fence the north and east sides along the existing pathway extending as far as possible toward the amphitheater to accommodate off-leash dog activity during all open hours for the park." He added that Phase two will improve drainage on the existing turf area.

Although some residents encouraged the Commission to not spend approximately \$7,000 on a study, consultants and facilitators of the workshop - Mark Slicheter and Matt Gruber of Callendar Associates - were retained to do just that. The landscape architects gathered input from residents who weren't shy about sharing their opinions in response to two questions: What do you like or value about the park, and, what could be improved? Attendees were divided into two groups to answer both questions. At times the wish list discussion came perilously close to veering off track, but well-behaved, neighborly residents with a variety of opinions were quite civil.

Surprisingly, a large portion of attendees found common ground, agreeing that it would be best to have the tot lot and the youth playground both located near the restrooms. One resident called the Park "a Norman Rockwell painting," very family oriented. Four large pages were filled with resident suggestions of what they like about the park, noting everything from its rustic nature to the level walking area and of course, as a great place to socialize with your dog. The current rules state that there can be no off-leash dogs in the park from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekends.

At issue is finding an optimal way for the park to address the majority of needs of town residents, which includes dog owners and non-dog owners. Is there room for improvement in the soggy two acre grass field and layout of play areas along with a possible fence to separate dogs from people?

For some of the residents in attendance Rancho Laguna Park, located at the south end of town, has been working reasonably well for the last thirty years, and if it's not broken, don't fix it. Others, clearly the minority in attendance, were concerned about off-leash dogs. Tina Chambers, mom of two, dog owner and active Boy Scout leader was, "very much an advocate of spatial separation," calling the current situation, "unsafe for my dog and my kids."

Bob Reynolds, a long time resident, pointed out that the Town has limited resources and the semi-paved path on Mulholland Ridge, off of Donald Drive, is available all day, every day for off-leash dogs.

Garnering applause for her comments, Jan Gruen suggested, "I think everybody can learn to share the Park." It will be up to the Town Council to decide the matter and allocate funding at the October 26 meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium.

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