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Moraga Town Council to Review Dog Park Plans Tonight

By Sophie Braccini

Tonight the Moraga Town Council will review not one, but three plans for providing physical separation between off-leash dogs and other park users at Rancho Laguna Park - the creation of a fenced dog park.

After nearly three years of discussion, and on the verge of suspending all off-leash hours at the Park, on March 29 the Council gave park users until May 9 to come up with a community-supported plan to share the park in a way that would meet the needs of all stakeholders, from dog owners, to sports users, to families, picnickers, and seniors. The community group that quickly formed produced a plan that will be discussed tonight. In addition two members of the group, who found themselves in the minority, have put forward their own ideas for the Council's review. In the fall of 2011 the Town hired a consultant, Callander Associates, to help focus public input and design a park that would meet the various needs of all users. The three plans that emerged from the committee have their origins in that process but have been modified from Callander's original drawings.

After meeting 3 times, between March 28 and April 14, a committee of 15 members chaired and co-chaired by residents Cherie Grant and Dick Ayres, respectively, provided the Town with what has been called Option C (also known as the "Mickey-Mouse plan") a design that cuts Rancho Laguna Park in two, across the field, so that off-leash dogs and sports users would all have access to grassy areas.

Two other plans were proposed by dissenting members of the committee. Plan D1 uses the same concept but adds, among other elements, turf to the north side of the park to accommodate a U-12 soccer field. This plan also includes a pedestrian path on both sides of the fence to allow walkers, with or without dogs, to use a 'loop' trail.

The third option, D2, proposes to set back the entrance and fencing of the dog park to minimize the visual impact and retain approximately one-third of the area along the north side of the park for picnic tables and barbecues since this area is considered the sunniest part of the park.

The Council will also review the Biological Resources Assessment of Rancho Laguna Park that was conducted by WRA Environmental Consultants in April. The report, which will impact the design of a dog park, indicates that the setback area set aside for a riparian corridor should be expanded to include the Mixed Riparian Woodland, which is considered sensitive habitat by the California Department of Fish and Game. In addition several nests of dusky-footed woodrats-which are on the State's list of Species of Special Concern-were found at the site.

The Council could also consider other options, including earlier versions of dog park plans for Rancho Laguna, or moving the dog park to another Town-owned facility such as the Commons Park.

Should the Council opt to move forward with changes to Rancho Laguna Park it will need to outline next steps, including a full CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) review, a possible phased-implementation plan, and whether to reduce or eliminate the current off-leash hours in the meantime.

The Town Council meets at 7 p.m. tonight in the auditorium of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. The public is welcome.

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