

TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

ATTN: POLICY AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

FROM: CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE: JUNE 26, 2007

CMR:290:07

SUBJECT: DIRECTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RENAMING OF CITY FACILITY TO HONOR DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND CORETTA SCOTT KING

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Policy & Services Committee review and recommend to the City Council the renaming of either Lytton Plaza or City Hall Plaza in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King.

BACKGROUND

The City Council considered a Colleagues' Memo on January 16, 2007 to rename a City street in honor of the contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King. The Council took action to refer this matter to the Policy & Services Committee. On February 13, the Policy & Services Committee directed staff to further explore the possibility of renaming a City park, plaza or facility in honor of the Kings. Prior to review of the matter by the Policy & Services Committee in February, staff investigated the feasibility of renaming Oregon Expressway or another City street. Staff identified substantial challenges to renaming a City street. The Committee directed staff to work with the Palo Alto Historical Association to nominate a park, plaza, or City facility to be renamed and suggested the following facilities as appropriate alternatives: City Hall Plaza; Lytton Plaza; the Friendship pedestrian bridge between the Palo Alto Baylands and East Palo Alto; the Main Library; or the Baylands Athletic Center. In particular, the Committee identified City Hall Plaza as a preferred alternative.

DISCUSSION

Staff from the Community Services Department have worked with the Palo Alto Historical Association (PAHA) over the past few months to evaluate these alternatives. Attachment E to this staff report is the report from PAHA that outlines the analysis of the various alternatives. The association recommended that the City consider renaming Lytton Plaza Park, City Hall Plaza or a reading area in a future rebuilt Mitchell Park Library. Staff agrees with the analyses

presented by PAHA on the Lytton Plaza and City Hall Plaza alternatives. However, the Mitchell Park Library alternative may present challenges from a timing perspective. If a bond election is held in June 2008 and is successful, the facility will probably not be completed until 2009 or later. Additionally, the City may want to leave naming options flexible in the future library if donations are solicited to help offset the costs of a new facility.

In accordance with City Policy 1-15, Naming City-owned Parks and Facilities, if the Council desires to name the City Hall plaza in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, the Policy and Services Committee would consider the merits of the naming nomination and would transmit its recommendation to the full Council for approval. Since the City Hall plaza is not currently named, and is not considered a park or recreation facility, the name nomination would not require the prior review and recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

If, however, the Council desires to re-name Lytton Plaza in honor of the Kings, since the facility is a City park and has a long-recognized name, the name suggestion requires the review of the Palo Alto Historical Association (completed), and then the Parks and Recreation Commission following the criteria outlined below. Staff from the City Attorney's Office and Planning have reviewed City documents related to the acquisition of Lytton Plaza and were unable to identify any restrictions related to the naming of this plaza.

Documentation of Past History and Justification for Name Selection: In accordance with the naming policy, the Palo Alto Historical Association is the first level of review of park and facility names. The process of name review requires the person or group making a naming suggestion to document the reasons for the particular suggestion; the historical connection between the name and the park or facility; and, in the case of a proposal to name a facility for a person, the contributions that the individual has made to the community. A naming suggestion form helps to standardize nominations.

The Palo Alto Historical Association reviews the suggested park or facility naming to assess the historical or geographical context of the name.

Role of Advisory Commissions or Committees in Reviewing Names: The Parks and Recreation Commission has a role in the review of names for parks, City-owned lands and recreation facilities; the Library Advisory Commission has a review role in names for libraries; the Public Arts Commission in names for art facilities; and the Policy and Services Committee in the review of names for police, fire, utility or other civic facilities – including the City Hall plaza. The Commission or Committee provides a forum for public comment, ensures that the name of the park or facility properly reflects the history and culture of the neighborhood or user group that the facility will serve. The appropriate commission also helps to determine whether the suggested name is helpful to the public in identifying the location of the facility and whether the name is consistent with the character of the park or facility.

Criteria For Renaming Parks And Facilities:

Many Palo Alto parks and City facilities have been renamed in honor of persons who have made significant contributions to the community or who have historically been associated with the area

where the park is located. Seven city parks that have been renamed in honor of individuals originally had geographic names, such as Meadow Park, Mayfield Park and Amarillo Park. After the death of Lucie Stern, the Palo Alto Community Center was renamed the Lucie Stern Community Center in honor of the benefactor of the center and many other city facilities.

The advantage of renaming a park or facility is that it provides a process for the recognition of persons who have made an outstanding contribution to the community. In cases where the test of time indicates that a person was unsuitable or that there is not a proper historical connection between the park and the individual, a new name can be chosen.

The disadvantage of renaming a park or facility is that when the site is recognized by the community or it serves as a geographical reference point, changing the name can cause confusion to the public in finding the site. This is generally more of a problem for popular destinations that are regionally known than small neighborhood or mini-parks.

City policy discourages the renaming of existing park or recreational facilities, particularly one whose name has regional significance, unless there are extraordinary circumstances, and no other new facility or portion of an existing park or facility can be named. The renaming policy suggests that if a park or facility is to be renamed in honor of a person, that this only be done when the person or persons have made “major, overriding contributions to the City and whose distinctions are as yet unrecognized.” These extraordinary contributions would be detailed on the name suggestion form and would be expanded upon by the review of the Historical Association.

In considering whether it is appropriate to rename a City park or facility, the Policy outlines three criteria that should be used by the City Council:

1. Has the person(s) made lasting and significant contributions to the protection of natural or cultural resources of the City of Palo Alto? or
2. Has the person(s) made substantial contributions to the betterment of a specific facility or park, consistent with the established standards for the facility? or
3. Has the person(s) made substantial contributions to the advancement of recreational opportunities within the City of Palo Alto?

RESOURCE IMPACT

The most significant resource impact of renaming either Lytton Plaza or City Hall Plaza will be any necessary signage changes or changes to publications referencing the names of either plaza. This may be more significant for Lytton Plaza as it is a recognized park and may be referenced in more locations than City Hall Plaza. Due to the nature of usage of the two plazas and their locations, the City may want to consider installation of a more permanent plaque or sign as compared to the traditional wooden signs installed at other community parks. The estimated cost of this type of signage is approximately \$10,000. If the Committee directs staff to proceed with the renaming of either plaza, staff will further research and refine this estimate. Any sign installation at the plazas would also potentially need review by the Architectural Review Board.

Additionally, renaming Lytton Plaza will require staff effort to bring the issue before the Parks and Recreation Commission and then back to the City Council. Renaming City Hall Plaza would only require consideration by Policy & Services and then final action by the Council.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report is consistent with direction provided by the City Council during previous discussions of renaming in recognition of the Kings.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This is not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

- Attachment A: January 16, 2007 Colleagues' Memo
- Attachment B: Excerpt of minutes from January 16, 2007 Council meeting
- Attachment C: February 13, 2007 Colleagues' Memo to Policy & Services Committee
- Attachment D: Excerpt of minutes from February 13, 2007 Policy & Services Committee meeting
- Attachment E: Report from the Palo Alto Historical Association regarding renaming alternatives in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King

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