

Parks and Recreation Commission Recommendation

El Camino Park Re-Design

The Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed the park re-design presented to the Commission by Staff and the architect on 3/26/13. That design - and our focus - was in the area of the park bounded by El Camino on the west, Alma on the north, the railroad tracks on the east, and the end of the outfield grass beyond the softball/baseball field on the south.

Summary

Consistent with Commissioner comments that evening, the El Camino Park Ad Hoc Committee concluded that the newly proposed design does not meet appropriate standards for all users in a Palo Alto park. It is a design of compromise which does not work. The inclusion of a dog park and a space reserved as a possible location for the Julia Morgan building forces too many elements into too little space. The design presented simply has NO passive space for use by citizens. It is consumed by sports fields, reserved space for the Julia Morgan Building, parking lots, and a dog park compressed into such a small space that the functionality of each use is diminished. The commission recommends proceeding with the previously approved design.

However, if Council does not accept this recommendation and requires a contingent land bank for the Julia Morgan building, we believe some element has to be removed or reduced in size to create a minimum amount of open space. There are only a few options: the dog park, the soccer field, the multi-use field (baseball/softball/lacrosse), or some parking.

Recommendations

- I. The commission reiterates the following recommendations:
 - a) We recommend against moving the Julia Morgan building to the park. In addition to negatively impacting other park uses, the addition of the building without a plan for how it will be used impedes appropriate facility planning for access and parking requirements as well as for management, operations and staffing costs. Furthermore, in order to reserve space in the park for the Julia Morgan building, the proposed redesign shifts the soccer field substantially to the north (left in the diagram) resulting in restricted space surrounding the soccer field for teams and spectators, and loss of much of the open space in the original design.
 - b) We previously identified a number of possible locations for the Julia Morgan building. Among these, we believe the new Baylands Golf Course should be given serious consideration for its new location. The historic building would have very high visibility as the only structure in the open space of the new Baylands course and would retain its historic purpose as a public gathering space. The building would enhance - and be compatible with - the beauty of the new

golf course design and replace the run-down clubhouse/restaurant building currently on the site. And, significantly compared to other possible locations, the building will have a specific and needed purpose, be self-supporting and be used extensively by Palo Alto residents and visitors.

- c) We recommend against locating a dog park within the main body of the park. Environmental considerations have precluded locating the dog park across Alma in the eucalyptus grove which was the original design. That was a large, self-contained area separate from all other park improvements. Now that this is not an option, forcing it into the originally designed open space compromises the one true/dedicated passive space in the approved design. Further, we believe it is best to evaluate the optimal locations for additional dog parks in the city via the upcoming Palo Alto Parks Master Plan instead of on an ad hoc basis.

II. If Council nonetheless votes in favor of a contingent land bank plan for the Julia Morgan building, we recommend the following changes to the proposed re-design:

a) Eliminate planned investments in artificial turf and lighting infrastructure and reduce the soccer field to mid-size in order to accommodate players, spectators, and routine constituent flow around the field. The full size field is not absolutely essential at this time although it is highly preferred. Further, the primary users of a mid-size field will be under the age of 12. Unlike the neighborhood fields typically used by that population, El Camino Park is in a more remote location and not easily accessible for young players by walking or bicycling. In addition, there is little demand by U12 teams for artificial turf or lighted fields. While the PARC supports investment in artificial turf and lighting at this site in order to allow flexibility to meet growing field demand, we cannot justify those investments without the potential for use by adults and older youth.

b) Eliminate the dog park, so there is certainty of at least a bit of open space. Per the original design, place ample picnic tables and benches within the open space.