



Staff Report

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION ON SEMERIA PARK PROJECT

Honorable Chair and Commissioners:

Summary

On September 20, 2008 the Parks and Recreation Commission held a special meeting to receive input from nearby residents on the proposed park project at Semeria Avenue and Casa Bona Avenue. The public meeting was attended by 57 residents who provided the Commission with input into the features and functions the community would like incorporated into the park design. It appeared all of the attendees unilaterally support the proposed park project and the recreational opportunities it will provide the neighborhood.

The overall consensus of the public's input was that the area should be developed with a play structure for young children, a swing set that can be used by all ages, benches where neighbors can converse, an open area for riding bicycles and other activities, trees for shade, perimeter fencing for users safety and landscaping that will enhance the beauty of the neighborhood.

The public identified issues including whether the site should be designed to allow for off street parking, lighting for night time visibility and the possibility of installing speed bumps or signage for additional safety at the intersection.

Background

A parcel of land at the intersection of Semeria Avenue and Casa Bona Avenue was purchased in 2005 by the City of Belmont which was dedicated as a future park site. During the Priority Calendar ranking process, the City Council ranked Semeria Park as their top priority for 2008. The Parks and Recreation Commission also ranked the project as their top priority. A number of residents of the Cipriani neighborhood have spoken in favor of the proposed park project to both the Parks and Recreation Commission and the City Council.

The Parks and Recreation Commission held a special meeting on September 20, 2008 to allow for public input on the proposed park project. The outreach meeting was attended by approximately 57 residents.

Resident's comments included the following:

- Include trees, lawn area, plants
- Play structures for different age groups
- Provide perimeter fencing for safety
- Include pathways for bicycle riding and other activities
- Install a dog litter station
- Install a drinking fountain
- Encourage the use of neutral colors for play structure
- Include small picnic area without a barbeque
- Swings for toddlers, youths and adults

Other comments included:

- Lighting for visibility into the park
- Do not allow parking
- Allow some parking with restrictions
- Speed bumps or Stop signs at intersection

Staff has identified the State of California 2002 Resources Bond Act as a source of funding for the Semeria Park project. The City of Belmont has an allocation of \$220,000 available through the Per Capita Program and an additional \$68,000 allocated from the Roberti-Z'berg Harris Block Grant. The project must be completed by May 2011 to ensure use of the bond funding. The combined amount of \$288,000 is available to the City of Belmont through the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002. A portion of the funds can be used for Landscape Architect services (non-construction costs) with the remainder being used for construction costs.

Public Contact

Posting of agenda

Recommendation

Staff is recommending that the P&R Department contract for the services of a Landscape Architect to provide design options for Semeria Park. The Commission's recommendation will be presented to the City Council for approval at a future meeting.

Alternatives

1. Take no action
2. Make other recommendation
3. Refer to staff for additional information

Attachments

- A. Draft minutes from September 20, 2008 meeting

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Ourtiague
Parks Manager

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**City of Belmont
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 20, 2008
DRAFT MINUTES**

The special meeting of the Belmont Parks & Recreation Commission of September 20, 2008 was called to order @ 10:07 a.m. at Semeria Park.

I. ROLL CALL

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Bortoli, Andrews, Warden, King, Cheechov, & Sullivan

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Moissiy, Rafi & Shjeflo

STAFF PRESENT: Parks Manager (PM) Ourtiague and Secretary Saggau

CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT: Councilmembers Feierbach & Braunstein

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the regular meeting of September 3, 2008 were approved by unanimous voice vote.

III. SPECIAL MEETING BUSINESS

Park Development Input

C Bortoli explained the Commission would like to hear input from the residents on what they would like to see at this location for a proposed park. He noted there is a budget of \$250,000 for this project. He stated at the next Commission meeting on October 1 this item will be on the agenda which will provide another opportunity for residents to give their input.

John Obertelli asked about potential liability of a play structure. C Bortoli said he believed the City assumes some liability and noted concerns that need to be considered are parking and safety at this intersection.

Bill Pope preferred that no skateboard ramps be installed and also asked about lighting at the park. C Bortoli noted that city parks close at dusk and lighting can be touchy and suggested maybe a timer could be used at the site.

Bill Dean would like to see trees, grass, have it nice looking, and include places for kids to play.

He would not support a parking area on this site.

Neighborhood parent said she would like to see a tot park with fencing around it. She added there should be separate areas for the smaller kids and bigger kids. She requested baby swings and suggested using the rubber material on the ground for ease of maintenance. She mentioned many people have dogs and perhaps a fenced-in dog area could be included in the back.

Melinda Meier agreed a separated tot lot was a great idea. She would like to see something that grows with kids and a grassy area would provide a place to play.

Art Paley agreed with the comments on the tot lot but did not think dogs should be integrated with children. He noted the play area by the library works fine.

Todd Adler acknowledged this may be a contentious issue but that some parking should be included at the site due to the narrow streets. He added it may be necessary to have speed bumps at this site for safety.

C Bortoli agreed some parking may be needed for those that need to unload food for a picnic. One resident suggested having a sidewalk all the way around would provide an area for people to park. Another resident suggested limiting the time allowed for parking.

Michael Linden expressed concern with children darting out in the street and agreed speed bumps may be needed. He was opposed to dogs at the park and noted barking would be amplified into the neighborhood. He did not think the park should be used for picnics as then more cars would park in the area.

Lucille Ulrich preferred not to have picnic tables, but benches. She questioned if there would be room enough to have a sidewalk around the perimeter of the park providing a place where children could ride their tricycles.

Jeff Schmitz agreed there is no good place for kids to ride bikes and would like to see some sort of sidewalk or pathway. He added he would like the park to be very green with drought resistant trees.

One resident stated he would prefer that permanent parking not be made available for residents.

Sarti said she would have a problem with not providing a little bit of parking at the site as the road is very narrow.

Resident commented that he agreed that the park should not have a picnic area as wild animals would be attracted to the food source.

Resident that grew up in the neighborhood noted that youths in the 7-13 age range need places too.

Dennis Fetterly said he agreed with a lot of other comments. He would like to see an open space used for a variety of purposes including play structures but would not like the space to become too fragmented. He supported the idea of having a bike track around the outside. He also had a concern about animals being attracted to a picnic area.

Resident noted the importance of providing shade in the park.

Ginger Bushue said the play structures would be for little kids. For the older kids she suggested swing sets which would accommodate all ages including adults. She preferred that lighting not be permanent as that would impact neighborhood residents.

Ms. Bushue questioned if the City has any restrictions on developing this park and questioned if they would agree to maintain grass at the park due to the expense. PM Ourtiague explained the City had for many years limited park development due to the maintenance costs but now the thought is if you don't build now when will it be done. The City has an obligation to maintain what it builds.

Barbara Fetterly –Agreed swings are a great idea. She suggested including a dome structure. She noted she has a dog but would not want dogs in this park. She thought little and big picnic benches would be a great idea. She reiterated the importance of providing shade in the park.

A resident suggested considering if the Belmont Garden Club would be willing to assist with this park.

One resident noted that deer are common in this area and would not want the City to spend money on plants that would get eaten. Raccoons are also a concern with garbage cans.

Laura Sullivan requested a fence be placed around the perimeter that has a gate that closes with a latch.

Mark Schoenstein supported a tot lot with a fence around the perimeter. He agreed with a pathway around the perimeter and limited parking. He would like to see greenery included in the park.

PM Ourtiague explained that city parks are closed from sunset to sunrise and dogs must remain on leash.

Adjacent neighbor noted this park would directly affect her family and was concerned about

lighting. She supported the black rubber surface because grass will not work and was concerned about expense and maintenance. She would not want dogs because people do not always clean up after them. If a fence is installed she would like a lower fence versus a tall fence. She asked that the trees planted not be too tall as she likes her view. She asked that a play structure accommodate all ages. She was fine with picnic benches, but not too many. She noted this should be a park and not a parking lot but currently neighbors take up this area with cars. She was concerned about safety and proposed a stop sign be installed and said she does not like speed bumps but perhaps they should be installed on Casa Bona and Semeria.

Mark Solar said he would prefer this be a neighborhood park and not a destination park.

Dog parent said she is 100% for not having dogs there. She noted that raccoons can be quite destructive with new sod. She does not have children and would like this park to be beautiful and a place that adults can enjoy too.

Another resident agreed it should be beautiful and agreed with having a fence installed but it should be visually appealing.

One resident noted the fence around the play structure at Twin Pines Park is a good example. She expressed concern with parking spaces at the end of the park and that they would be better placed on the sides of the park.

Bobbi Dean – was curious about the ground cover and if grass would survive well and be properly maintained. She noted another playground where they used shredded tires for cushioning the play structure.

PM Ourtiague noted the park crews maintain all the parks in Belmont which all have wildlife. Staff is familiar with their potential impact and has found ways to lessen any damage.

Staci Daley thought that some parking needs to be provided and preferred parallel for safety reasons. She had concerns with potential damage with carving on picnic tables and did not want a large picnic area. She was also concerned with the potential for graffiti on play structures.

Jane said this is a great area for walking. She suggested even though this would not be a dog park a dog waste dispenser could be installed. She would also like to see a water fountain in the park. She agreed with providing a bench and adult swings so that everyone in the community could enjoy the park.

One resident expressed concern with the parking situation and noted parking at this location occurs during the evening hours. She suggested allowing residents to park there at night since parking is so limited in this area. Another resident noted evening hours would be the time of day working adults could enjoy the park and was opposed to having residents use it as a parking lot.

A resident questioned what problems the City has had with neighborhood parks. C Bortoli said planting the right type of plant material has been one problem but this has been improved upon. C Bortoli added he was pleased that he has not heard today any concerns from neighbors that a park would bring a lot of park users that drive to the location. C Warden added if someone was going to drive somewhere they would likely go to Twin Pines or Cipriani Park. He recalled at College View Park some residents were concerned about the potential of increased usage of the park in their cul-de-sac but nobody drives to it.

The question of a name for the park was brought up. Suggestions included Casa Bona Playground, Semeria Playground and Casa Semeria.

Natasha grew up in this neighborhood and agreed with a lot that has been said but feels that simple is better. If there is open space they can do what they want to do there. This would make it possible to use it for various purposes.

Another resident that grew up in the neighborhood had played on this dirt lot and noted if there are too many structures this would limit the ability to use the park. She suggested installing a barbeque bit. C Bortoli noted people often bring portable barbeques parks. The adjacent neighbor was opposed to having a barbeque installed due to fire concern.

One resident suggested a compromise and having some play structure and some open space. She also requested that any play structure have a neutral color scheme.

A resident questioned where the process would go from here and if a Landscape Architect be hired to prepare two plans? C Bortoli explained the Commission is also working on a park for Davey Glen and has decided to recommend to the City Council that a Landscape Architect be hired to prepare plans for a passive park with overlays that can add different aspects to it. He thought this may be considered for this project too.

One resident said he agreed with all those that said “less is more” and keep it simple. And that the park should be a walking destination.

Hartley Laughead noted the neighborhood association president was not able to attend today but the association would like to participate in any way they can.

Another resident supported the idea of installing a dog waste disposal outside of the park for those walking outside of the park.

C Bortoli thanked everyone for their input and noted the Commission plans to meet and discuss this topic at their October 1 meeting.

One resident asked when the job would be completed. C Bortoli replied that the money needs to be spent by June 2011 but would likely be completed sooner. The Commission does not have a schedule yet; this will probably be set after a Landscape Architect is hired.

The question was raised if the Commission could for see any obstacles to this project. C Bortoli said he did not know of any. He noted the Commission had not thought about lighting and that needs to be considered.

PM Ourtiague explained the planning and the process takes the longest time but this project is on track and moving forward. He noted the Commission will meet on October 1st to deliberate and decide on possible next steps. They may recommend to the City Council that a Landscape Architect be hired to prepare some preliminary designs.

C King moved, seconded by C Warden, that the Commission close public comments. Vote 6-0 in favor.

C Warden questioned if it would be possible for the Commission to give staff direction to hire a Landscape Architect at their next meeting. He noted the Council has already approved this project in the budget. Staff will look into.

C Warden said he has lived in this neighborhood for 42 years and is thoroughly excited about developing this area. He noted two things important to him. (1) He thinks it needs to be an area for all kids but really for the smaller kids. He noted older kids get into other programs. He would like to have a tot lot neighbors can walk to and swings for older kids. (2) He said it is also important that this lot needs to be pretty. He would like to see something everyone would be proud to have in their neighborhood.

C King thanked everyone for their comments and assisting the Commission in visualizing what the park can be.

IV. NEXT MEETING

C Bortoli noted the next Commission meeting would be held on October 1st at 7:00 p.m.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Grace Saggau, Secretary
September 20, 2008