

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING  
LARKSPUR PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2013

COMMISSION: PRESENT: Chair McNally, Blauvelt,  
Friedel, Matteo

COMMISSION: ABSENT: Hauser

STAFF: PRESENT: Recreation Director Whitley  
Public Works Director Houlihan  
Recreation Supervisor Clegg

Chair McNally called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT CALENDAR

Approval of Minutes of June 20, 2013

M/s Blauvelt/Friedel to approve the minutes of June 20, 2013 as submitted.

Ayes: All

OPEN TIME

Ms. Laura Lovett reported the Friends of the Corte Madera Creek refurbished the kiosk at Remillard Park and ordered new signs. They plan to replace the stones underneath the kiosk. She asked if the City could move the trashcan that is currently located on the side of the parking lot to the area near the post with the doggie bags. The Commission thanked Ms. Lovett for her good work.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Relocation of Canine Commons Dog Park within Piper Park

Commissioner Blauvelt stated she lives within 500 feet of the proposed project and must recuse herself. She was advised by the City Attorney that she could speak as a resident during the public comment period.

Recreation Director Whitley presented a staff report.

Chair McNally asked if the mitigation measures have to be decided within a certain timeframe. Public Works Director Houlihan stated staff was given direction from the Council back in August and those plans are underway. Tonight's discussion pertains to the relocation of the dog park.

Public Works Director Houlihan made a Powerpoint presentation that included: 1) Environmental Concerns; 2) Community Concerns; 3) We Have an Opportunity; 4) Public Outreach and Input; 5) Considerations used in Choosing Potential Sites; 6) Sites considered; 7) Genesis of the Canine Commons Dog Park; 8) Dog Park Users Survey Results from Master Plan; 9) Locations within Piper Park; 10) Two Alternate Locations at Piper Park; 11) Proposed Site #1- North End of Piper Park; 12) Proposed Site #2- South End of Piper Park; 13) Benefits for Community and People; 14) Why Off-Leash; 15) Next Steps. Public Works Director Houlihan noted there was a third option- the elimination of the dog park. Staff is not recommending this option. She discussed the Bon Air Bridge Project and the necessary mitigations including restoring the current dog park at Piper Park to wetlands (natural habitat).

Public Works Director Houlihan stated the current dog park was too small and staff has identified areas that approximately double the size of the existing dog park. She referred to Site #1, North end of Piper Park, and noted there were benefits including existing shade and established turf. Some of the negatives include the distance from the parking lot and the use of this area as passive space. She referred to Site #2, South end of Piper Park, and stated staff was assured by representatives from the Central Marin Police Department that this location would not be an issue. Staff also spoke with the Department of Fish and Wildlife and a biologist who recommended appropriate fence lines. This site has some existing shade and mature trees. The site undulates which has been identified as a benefit for a dog park. It is in close proximity to the parking lot and is ADA accessible. She stated staff received strong support for Proposed Site #2- South end of Piper Park.

Commissioner Matteo referred to the survey results and asked if they were based on the entire community outreach effort or only the workshops. Public Works Director Houlihan stated the results reflected all outreach efforts.

Chair McNally asked why Proposed Site #2, South end of Piper Park was so much larger than Proposed Site #1, North end of Piper Park. Public Works Director Houlihan stated the diagrams and square footage figures were estimates. They could probably get more length on the southern option and the small dog park area would have more functionality.

Chair McNally asked about the height of the proposed fence. Public Works Director Houlihan stated it would be at least five feet high. Chair McNally asked if the fence could be somehow camouflaged as seen from Doherty Drive. Public Works Director Houlihan stated “yes” and added they could do some landscaping. The wildlife biologist has recommended a chain link fence.

Commissioner Matteo asked about the size of the existing dog park. Public Works Director Houlihan stated it was about  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre or around 10,000 square feet. She noted what was being proposed would be considered on the small side. An acre or more is considered the standard these days with  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre as the bare minimum.

Commissioner Matteo asked if the north site would overlap with the cricket field. Public Works Director Houlihan stated “no”.

Public Works Director Houlihan stated there was room for creativity in either site in terms of landscaping, berming, etc.

Chair McNally opened the meeting to public comments.

Ms. Lucinda Smith, Corte Madera, stated there was no dog park in Corte Madera so she uses the dog park in Larkspur. She is absolutely against the third option of “no dog park”. She stated an already established turf area would be a huge benefit but an established program of on-going maintenance was crucial. She is in favor of the southern option.

Ms. Pam McClain, Madrone Avenue, stated she uses the dog park every day. There is a regular group of people who use the north end of Piper Park as a dog park. She noted both options are designated as passive park space. The north end of the park should not be used as a dog park since it is a lovely, quiet space and would be too far from the parking lot. The southern option would be a better use of the park and would be accessible to the parking lot and more visible. The southern site was also less used than the northern site. She pointed out a triangular area in the park (above the picnic area and between the softball field and the creek) that could be considered as another option. Public Works Director Houlihan stated staff had looked at this option but decided against it due to the proximity to some of the other uses and the creek.

Ms. Laura Lovett expressed concern with the preservation of passive space in Piper Park. She noted the proposed sites are designated as passive space. She was concerned about the park getting busier, noisier, and full of fences. Dogs do not need an acre in which to run and the grass will soon become a dirt pit.

Ms. Diane Flores, Corte Madera, stated people who come to the dog park from other cities end up spending money in Larkspur. The first dog park in Piper Park was larger and well used. She suggested they use the benches and trees at the existing dog park in the new dog park. She preferred the southern option.

Mr. Bill Flores, Corte Madera, stated the southern option is preferable. With proper maintenance the grass could continue to grow in the new dog park. He stated there were fences all along Doherty Drive (Redwood High School, The New Homes project, etc.). He stated the new dog park should have some type of shade structure.

A resident stated staff could find out from the Marin Humane Society how to keep the grass growing in the new dog park.

Ms. Kathleen Galt, Cedar Avenue, stated this discussion is a 1980’s “déjà vu”. She has used Piper Park since the 1970’s. She travels around the country with her dogs and most

of the dog parks she has visited are well maintained and have grass. Dog parks are also used for social interaction by the dog owners. She stated “the larger the better”.

A resident stated it would be nice to have a new dog park in Piper Park.

Ms. Sandy Blauvelt, Boardwalk One, stated she is in favor of moving the current dog park since it is an opportunity to enhance the marsh. The southern option is the preferred site but she is concerned about the size- it is too large and twice the size of the current dog park. The Commission has gone to great lengths over the years to preserve passive space and the park has many user groups. Canine Commons was the first dog park in Marin County (1970’s). She reiterated the need for passive space where people could do “unorganized” activities or do nothing at all.

A resident stated a dog park should be a large size and smaller parks are not healthy for running dogs when they have to “slam on their brakes”.

A resident stated there was an adequate amount of passive area in Piper Park.

Chair McNally closed the meeting to public comments.

Commissioner Matteo had questions about what would happen to the current dog park area. Public Works Director Houlihan discussed the restoration of the current dog park area and noted about half of the current area could be used as passive space. They might be able to install benches, decomposed granite, some trees, interpretative signage, etc. Commissioner Matteo asked if the Federal funding would cover the cost of the new dog park and the restoration of the old. Public Works Director Houlihan stated it would cover 90%. Commissioner Matteo asked about the cost to build a new dog park. Public Works Director Houlihan stated she has not run the numbers yet but the budget allocates about \$100,000. Commissioner Matteo asked if the timing of the funding was dependent upon decisions being made. Public Works Director Houlihan stated the City needs to move forward with the decision.

Commissioner Friedel referred to Proposed Site #2 and stated that while it seemed large, she was not sure how to make it smaller. She suggested some of the area by the sand volleyball courts be eliminated. Public Works Director Houlihan stated that was a good suggestion. Commissioner Friedel had questions about the proposed surface. Public Works Director Houlihan stated maintaining turf in a dog park was very doable. The entry points could be some type of artificial surface. Chair McNally asked staff to point out the marsh area. Commissioner Friedel had questions about line-of-sight issues. Public Works Director Houlihan stated she is working with the Central Marin Police Department on this issue.

Chair McNally asked staff about their research into dog park sizes. Public Works Director Houlihan stated staff did a lot of research into this issue and the two proposals would be considered small. A “small” dog park would be one half acre (22,000 square feet) and the recommended size of one acre or greater. She noted that undulation is also

recommended. Chair McNally noted the dog park would be next to the Central Marin Police Department “rain garden”. Recreation Director Whitley agreed and noted there would not be any changes made to the “rain garden”.

Commissioner Matteo referred to the prior proposal for a dog park at Niven Park and stated it is already being used as an informal dog park. Public Works Director Houlihan stated not all of the people that take their dogs to that park live in that neighborhood. There was very strong opposition to that site being turned into a dog park. She reiterated that staff looked at various locations throughout Larkspur.

Commissioner Matteo stated staff did a great job at outreach. He acknowledged that a dog park should be big enough for dogs to run and get exercise. He prefers Proposed Site #2- South end of Piper Park over the other option. However, he is concerned about the passive use issue and noted the Commission went through an extensive Piper Park Master Plan revision process just a year ago. Goal #1 in the Master Plan is to “preserve the balance of passive and active space”. He was concerned about taking over 30,000 square feet of passive space. He was not sure he could support either of the proposals. He does, however, want a dog park.

Commissioner Friedel stated she favors Proposed Site #2- South end of Piper Park. She understood that a dog park should be bigger but she would rather have no dog park than lose 30,000 square feet of passive space. The proposed size is too big.

Chair McNally stated he prefers Proposed Site #2- South end of Piper Park but thought it could be smaller. Parking is close by and people could easily walk to this location. There is a restroom close by. He has never seen anyone playing Frisbee or lounging around in this area. There should definitely be a dog park in Larkspur. He thought about 4,000 square feet could be eliminated. Public Works Director Houlihan stated the recommended length is 300 feet for large dogs and 200 feet for small dogs.

Commissioner Friedel asked if the dogs would get agitated from volleyballs flying through the air and kids yelling from the playground. Public Works Director Houlihan stated she did not see any anecdotal evidence of that in her research. They are also allowing for enough separation. The restroom structure and trees would provide a buffer. She suggested they target a dog park of at least ½ acre.

Commissioner Matteo stated he was concerned about setting a precedent by giving up passive space in the park. He asked if they should be willing to trade off some active space.

Chair McNally stated it was the consensus of the Commission that Proposed Site #2- South end of Piper Park was the preferred location for relocating the dog park. The Commission would like the size of the dog park reduced.

Public Works Director Houlihan stated staff would return to the Commission for input about the design. She added staff would hold an “outside workshop” with the public and their dogs during the design process.

Recreation Director Whitley stated the Council would review this item on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Commissioner Blauvelt returned to the dais.

#### RECREATION DIRECTOR’S ORAL REPORT

Public Works Director Houlihan reported staff hired a consultant to work on the Mini Parks Action Plan. Staff is planning to hold a workshop meeting with the Commission and the consultant in October to talk about how to move forward with the plan.

Public Works Director Houlihan reported that BCDC is requiring the enhancement/improved accessibility of the Bon Air dock and the Marin Rowing Club dock as part of the mitigations for the Bon Air Bridge Project. Federal funding would cover 90% of the cost of these improvements.

Public Works Director Houlihan stated the play structure at Piper Park needs to be replaced. The Commission and the Council would review this item soon.

Public Works Director Houlihan stated the Public Works/Engineering Department office would be moving across the street soon. Removal of that portable building that currently houses the department would return the area to passive space.

Chair McNally asked about the sign at Centennial Park. Public Works Director Houlihan stated she was working on that.

Public Works Director Houlihan reported the grass areas at Piper Park, Niven Park, and Neighborhood Park have been aerated and fertilized and look more healthy. Staff is also making more irrigation repairs and is looking at conversion to a more eco-friendly system. Staff has been talking with MMWD about rebate alternatives.

Recreation Director Whitley reported the Fall/Winter brochure was recently released and is available on the City Website. Staff is looking at re-signing the entrance to Piper Park. Commissioner Blauvelt stated she would like to see consistency in signage. She wants to make sure the Commission reviews the design.

Recreation Director Whitley stated it was a banner year for the Super Cool Summer School on its brand new campus (Kent Middle School). Over 1,000 students attended during the four weeks of school. The school employed over 50 teachers, and over 140 middle school, high school, and college kids.

Supervisor Clegg reported the Teen/Tween Programs were very successful over the summer and included roller skating, ice skating, a trip to the beach, Water World, etc.

She stated Mr. James Fester, Hall Middle School Social Studies teacher, assisted her on the trips. She is working on more events/activities for the fall and winter.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

There were no reports.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Toni DeFrancis  
Recording Secretary