Meeting Date: December 15, 2009

TOWN OF MORAGA STAFF REPORT

To: **Parks and Recreation Commission**

From: **Jay Ingram, Parks and Recreation Director**

Subject: **December Agenda Items**

Unfinished Business

Rancho Laguna Program Planning Sub-Committee recommendation(s) –

Last Thursday evening the Sub-Committee voted to forward two recommendations to the Park and Recreation Commission for consideration regarding spatial separation at Rancho Laguna Park.

Option A (attachment A) suggests fencing the north and south picnic/playground areas to provide a spatial separation while making the picnic/playground areas dog free zones. Dogs would continue with use of the existing turf area and the current temporal separation. In addition, there would be a dedicated/fenced park for small dogs located in the back of the park where poison oak currently exists. This option, if not modified too much, comes with the potential of funding from the Friends of Rancho Laguna Park in the realm of $50,000 (excluding funding for dedicated small dog area). This option passed with a 4-2 vote in favor.

Option B (attachment A) suggests fencing only the north section of the park and providing modifications that should include newly irrigated turf and an additional walking path within the newly fenced area. This option dedicates the entire north section (approximately 68,900 sq. ft or 1.582 acres according to Moraga Planning Departments calculations) to off-leash dogs during any time the park is open to the public. The temporal separation is eliminated. This option passed with a 5-1 vote in favor.

Additional amenities agreed upon include poop station dispensers, access to water for dogs and a bulletin board that includes proper signage. A dog washing station was also briefly discussed, at a late hour.

Request

Provide the Town Council with a recommendation that accomplishes their request, to expeditiously study a permanent spatial separation solution that would provide for a

separation between the dogs and other users of the park with sufficient acreage to make it a proper dog park facility.

Background

The Sub-Committee discussed Rancho Laguna park issues since early September through public meetings, workshops and surveys. The Sub-Committee collected 475 surveys and received feedback from approximately 50 people at the two workshops.

The survey, designed by the sub-committee (with public input) and approved by the sub-committee was not intended to be a statistically valid document. Its intended use was as an additional source of information the sub-committee could use to encourage and enhance community outreach. Survey responses to question 13 are provided (attachment C). Question 13 allowed for three "write-in" answers and asked, what changes or upgrades would you suggest be made at Rancho Laguna Park?

As the sub-committee summarized survey data and public input the meeting audience grew. The largest crowd was 30. On average, not including the September meetings, attendance was about 18. Of the 18, approximately six spoke at each meeting, while the rest listened. It is important that the Park and Recreation Commission consider all information, from the public input to the surveys.

Since 46% of the survey responses indicated the thing they liked least about Rancho Laguna Park was off-leash dogs, this question warranted additional study. Because of responses to questions five and six in the survey, four groups of "park users" could be identified.

1) No children and no dogs
2) Children and no dogs
3) No children and dogs
4) Children and dogs

Regarding the question - What do you like best about Rancho Laguna Park? Less than 10% of groups one and two said they liked off-leash hours for dogs best while groups three and four were above 70%.

Regarding the question - What do you like least about Rancho Laguna Park? About 70% of groups one and two said they least liked off-leash dogs while groups three and four were about 8%.

From the numbers above it is fair to say those individuals that took the survey with the "no dog" during last visit response, have a concern with off-leash dogs. However, those individuals that took the survey with the "yes" to dogs during last visit, do not have a concern with off-leash dogs. The challenge in designing a multi-use park will be to balance the varied response.

After reviewing the surveys as a whole it is clear that people like the passive, natural setting as well as the walking paths, playgrounds and turf area.

Survey Responses

Question	Highest %	Second highest %	Third highest
Where do you live?	86% Moraga	12% Laf./Orinda	2% Other CCC
How have you used the park in the last year?	46% Playgrounds	39% Picnics	36% Exercise
What facilities do you typically use?	57% Walkways	52% Turf	46% Playgrounds
What do you like **best** about the park?	65% Natural setting	40% Quiet	32% off-leash
What do you like **least** about the park?	46% off-leash	39% Soggy grass	12% Team sports
What facilities would cause you to visit more often?	24% Better lawn	21% Fenced dog area	20% Playgrounds

Of the 19 local jurisdictions in Contra Costa County, ten provide spatially separated, dedicated dog parks and eight do not provide spatially separated dogs parks at all. Moraga is the only Town in Lamorinda that allows off-leash dogs in a public park. Apparently there is a rumor that Lafayette is considering a dog park. After a brief conversation with the Lafayette staff that was confirmed to be untrue. However, in 2001 the Lafayette, Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission was directed by its City Council to explore the possibility of establishing a dog park. The Lafayette Commission visited seven dog parks and presented five conclusions to a successful dog park.

1) A dog park should be an off-leash area for the exclusive use of the dogs and their owners and should not include mixed use.
2) The dog park needs to be securely contained on all sides either by a sturdy fence or natural barriers such as a rock wall.
3) The dog park should be located next to a major road where ample public parking is available, unless a parking lot is to be constructed.
4) The area should have open bare ground with good run off.
5) Users should be encourages to self-police and clean-up but Public Works will be required to provide regularly scheduled maintenance.

The American Kennel Club recommends when initiating a dog park a community start with one acre or more of land surrounded by a four- to six-foot high chain-link fence. Preferably, the fence should be equipped with a double-gated entry to keep dogs from escaping and to facilitate wheelchair access. If Moraga were to design a dog park in Rancho Laguna Park similar in size to neighboring communities that average size would be 1.42 acres. (Sampling taken from dog parks in Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord, Danville, Pinole, Pleasanton, Oakland, San Ramon and Walnut Creek).

On November 5 the Sub-Committee started with nine potential park designs. On December 10 they recommended two to the Park and Recreation Commission. Issues discussed throughout this process included survey validity, size of a dog park, removal of trees, sports complex concerns and municipal liability for off-leash dogs. The Sub-Committee and public was reminded on a number of occasions the July 22, 2009 direction from Town Council – for the Park and Recreation Commission to expeditiously study a permanent spatial separation solution that would provide for a separation between dogs and other users of the park with sufficient acreage to make it a proper dog park facility.

Some statements have been made that the Town would like to see Rancho Laguna Park turn into a revenue generating sports complex. This is simply not true. Would the Town like to use Rancho Laguna Park to continue with summer sports camps, after school sports camps, provide practice and game times to LMYA sports? Yes! This does not mean turning Rancho Laguna Park into a sports complex. This additional usage would make the park more multi-use, which was the purpose from the beginning of the Sub-Committee – *To create a design for Rancho Laguna Park that encourages maximum utilization while maintaining a safe environment for all people using the park.* The Town of Moraga only has two "active" parks for its 16,000 residents.

When the Town works with EuroSoccer Camps, we earn between $5,000 and $6,000 for the nine weeks of camp during the summer. EuroSoccer conducted a survey this past summer. Two comments specifically to Rancho Laguna Park included, "I liked the camps when they were held at the schools instead of the park. Rancho Laguna is a dog park, hence, dog poo everywhere." " The park in Moraga where it was held had a lot of off-leash dogs which would come up to the children, and a lot of dog poop on the grass. I know Eurosoccer can't do anything about it, except maybe find a new location?"

The question of municipal liability for off-leash dog parks was raised. The Sub-Committee was advised that their recommendation(s) should not be based in any way on liability issues. The Park and Recreation Commission recommendation(s) should not be based in any way on liability either. The task for the Sub-Committee and Park and Recreation Commission was spatial separation.

Discussion

It is requested that the Park and Recreation Commission provide recommendation(s) to the Town Council in preparation for a February Town Council Meeting.

Once recommendations are clearer it is recommended that the Park and Recreation Commission provide concept(s) to Lawrence Bennett a local landscape architect to provide a visual rendering for the Town Council. Mr. Bennett has agreed to volunteer his services.

Fiscal Impact

These dollar figures are very preliminary and require further refining.

Option A – if designed to meet the approval of the Friends of Rancho Laguna Park this option could be backed with as much as $50,000. All of that funding would go toward fencing the north and south sides of the park. Additional costs of other improvements such as poop bag stations, a bulletin board, dedicated fenced small dog area and improved turf would be funded by the Town/potential private donations.

Option B –

600 ft. fencing (including two gates and one vehicle gate)		$21,000
New irrigation and turf (10,000 sq. ft.)		$40,000
¼ mile gravel or decomposed granite path		$6,200-$21,000
Demolition/relocation of playground		$10,000
Fix existing turf/drainage		$19,500
	Total	**$96,700 – $111,500**

While the Town has pledged to use all the EBRPD Measure WW grant money available on the Camino Pablo Elementary school field, the project must still be publically bid when we reach that point in the process. If the contract awarded is less than $737,000 the Town could potentially use the remaining WW grant funds for Rancho Laguna Park. The Moraga Park Foundation has also stated that they would be interested in a fundraising effort for the park as well.

Alternatives

1) Provide recommendation(s) to the Town Council that accomplishes the direction given to expeditiously study a permanent spatial separation solution that would provide for a separation between the dogs and other users of the park with sufficient acreage to make it a proper dog park facility.
2) Provide alternative recommendation(s) to the Town Council.
3) Postpone recommendation and discuss at a future meeting.

Recommendation

Provide the Town Council with a recommended park re-design(s) that considers public input and accomplishes Town Council direction. Request the services of Mr. Lawrence Bennett draft some visual renderings.

Staff recommends option B with no trees being removed.

Attachments
A - Sub-Committee recommended drawings
B - Five park design options from 12-10-09 Sub-Committee meeting
C - Responses from survey question 13

New Business

Urban Forest Sub-Committee appointments – On November 12 the Town Council voted to approve the formulation of the Urban Forest Sub-Committee and did so through approval of the new charter (attached). The Park and Recreation Commission will be responsible for appointing this five member sub-committee, specifically the two members from the public. Commissioner Khanna has volunteered to chair this sub-committee as the Park and Recreation Commission representative. In order to get started with the sub-committee we need a full complement of five members. Please consider two residents that would be interested in serving on this sub-committee.