



Special Meeting Date: December 11, 2012

TOWN OF MORAGA

STAFF REPORT

To: Park and Recreation Commission
From: Jay Ingram, Parks and Recreation Director
Subject: December Agenda Items

New Business

Item VIII. A. Assessment Process for Commons Park – (discussion)

Background

At the November meeting the Park and Recreation Commission dismissed the option to conducting a consultant lead site master plan process for the Moraga Commons Park. This park is in the center of Town as well as the highest used public park in Moraga. For years the Commission has been approached by various groups regarding current and future Commons Park uses. Within the past two years the Commission has been involved in discussions regarding alternative uses for the “Back 40” and the sand volleyball pit. While a site master plan for the Commons Park would possibly be the best approach, it proved to be cost prohibitive, enabling the Commission to seek other options to study the Commons Park and its current and future uses.

The Commission directed staff to identify an effective way to engage volunteers in a community outreach process and see if costs could be reduced while still receiving a satisfactory product. A Saint Mary’s College Veterans Garden Project and Cal State East Bay were two options to researcher further. Staff followed up with both leads and they expressed interest in possibly helping the Town.

Staff contacted Dr. Chris Chamberlain a professor at Cal State East Bay and discussed the options of engaging a core group of Park and Recreation Students to conduct a Needs Assessment for the Park. Dr. Chamberlain will meet with Town staff after the December Commission meeting, so Commission input this month will be invaluable.

Assuming we use the Needs Assessment approach for this project the Commission should discuss details. Typically a needs assessment is an effective indicator of the efficiency and equity of current parks and recreation facilities, developed from a variety of sources. Needs assessments are often used to evaluate current services and facilities or to predict demand for future services and facilities.

Categories of needs assessment information

- Demographic Data (age, gender, marital status, family status, residential location, and job classification).
- User Participation patterns or current levels of use
- Attitudes of the consumer
- Barriers to participation
- Predictions of future participation
- Appraisals of existing park facilities and programs in the park
- Health hazard appraisal
- Areas for improvement

The three most common components included in a needs assessment are:

1. Program analysis which contains current and/or historical program participation rates for the Parks and Recreation Department programs and services at the park.
2. Public opinion survey to indicate current preferences for parks and recreation facilities, services and programs by the community.
3. Public forums which consist of a series of public meetings to collect community input concerning parks and recreation services and programs.

The collection of information may include the following methodologies:

Public forums (town meeting)	Recreation staff workshops
Recreation Commission workshops	Citizens' Advisory Committee

Purpose of a Needs Assessment

- Determine current participation rates for park activities and resources.
- Provide opportunity for input by residents through a random survey and public hearings.
- Establish a data base of participation rates.
- Identify current trends in recreation interests.

Collecting Needs Assessment Data

- Collect participation records for all park programs
- Separate participation records based on resource-based and program-based
- Develop a summary describing the current activity rates

Community Needs Survey

A community needs survey is a critical element of any park planning. The importance of gathering "community input" cannot be emphasized. This information will be used to justify the rationale for decisions which will impact future park plans. The community

needs survey is often the most time-consuming and expensive aspect of the planning process.

Basics of Community Survey Development

- Identify the information to be collected.
- Determine the appropriate sample size (number of citizens to be contacted). The three important elements to consider are: TIME, EXPENSE and LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE (margin of error).
- Develop the questionnaire
- Be sure the survey will be representative of the entire community. The respondents must reflect the proportions of the total population of the community.
- Survey preparation (pre-test survey)
- Analyze results and prepare a summary

Focus Groups

A focus group is one of the most popular tools in market research. They provide information on consumer preferences for new or existing programs, services or facilitates. The focus group discussion provides valuable insight into WHY citizens think and feel the way they do. The focus group is unique as it allows for group interaction.

A focus group is typically composed of seven to ten members who are unfamiliar with other group members. Participants are screened and selected because they have certain behaviors (characteristics) in common that relate to the focus group topic. It is a carefully planned discussion generated on a defined area of interest in a non-threatening environment lead by a skilled interviewer.

Public Hearing

This is a technique to collect non-random citizen data. It will usually be a series of hearings each on a different topic. The information gathered will be used to identify current needs and future trends. Public hearings should be limited in time with a two week prior public notice. The following steps are used to plan for a public hearing:

- Identify the specific topic for each public hearing;
- Reserve a facility able to accommodate the expected participants;
- Set a convenient time, usually around 7:00pm;
- Have adequate publicity using local radio, newspapers and cable stations at least two weeks prior to the meeting;
- Establish protocol for individuals who wish to address the planning committee; and
- Prepare a final summary or minutes of the meeting and have copies available to the public.

The information listed above is provided to initiate Commission discussions regarding an approach as we develop a process to study the Moraga Commons Park. Another important document to reference is the approved 2008 Parks and Recreation Master Plan document that provides valuable information through information collections dating back to 2006. That document in the Recommendations chapter includes a section on the Commons Park that states:

Moraga Commons is the Town's main community park, sitting on 40.2 acres in the heart of the Town. At present, the Commons houses a sizable amphitheater, play equipment, a disc golf course, skate park, basketball courts, a volleyball court, and a perimeter trail, which has been included in the park acreage. Recommendations for this site include:

Consider the development of a new site master plan, which may include the following elements:

- Develop a logical entrance with signage consistent with all Moraga Parks.
- Create a map of the site which also serves as a public art piece.
- Expand bike amenities.
- Renovate restrooms.
- Renovate and provide new picnic areas, including picnic tables for a variety of group sizes and a covered picnic shelter.
- Restore Laguna Creek to provide an improved overlook,
- improved creekside picnic area, and dry creek bed that serves as a natural sand and water play area
- Develop a community-scale play area.
- Provide ADA accessible seating and an accessible path of travel in front of the amphitheater.
- Consider relocating bocce court and horseshoe pits to a more central area near other small-scale sports facilities.
- Consider providing a gazebo for viewing sports activities.
- Develop a dog park in the 'Back 40.'

Discussion

Staff will meet with Dr. Chamberlain from Cal State East Bay to see what a core group of students can do as a research project/needs assessment for the Town, assuming that is what the Commission desires. Staff asks that the Commission discuss elements for a needs assessment outlined in the preceding pages and provide clearer direction for a process moving forward.

- What is our purpose for this project?
- What components/methods would we use to collect data – public opinion surveys,

public forums (community meetings, focus group, public hearings, workshops, etc).

- What is our timeline for research and deliverables?

Once this detail is finalized by the Commission, staff can share the information with faculty from Cal State East Bay to see what they can develop for the Park and Recreation Commission. Once we receive information from an assessment process, the next step will most likely be to seek cost estimates, possibly from a landscape architect. The Commission should discuss this phase at a later date and focus on process details at the December Commission meeting.

Recommendation

Provide direction to staff, including, but not limited to; our purpose for this project, what components/methods we feel are best to use for this project, and what is our project timeline? Having these questions discussed and answered in advance of the meeting with Dr. Chamberlain will allow him to scope this assessment process appropriately and eventually provide the Town with some beneficial information regarding community desired improvements to the Commons Park.