



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: November 14, 2007

TO: Park and Recreation Commission

FROM: Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Proposal for Leasing City Park Property for a Verizon Cellular Telecommunications Facility at the Municipal Tennis Courts

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission:

- A. Review and discuss a proposal from Ridge Communications to locate a Verizon Cellular telecommunications facility at the Santa Barbara Municipal Tennis Courts (Muni Tennis);
- B. Provide comments regarding the feasibility and appropriateness of leasing park and recreation land at this location for a cellular telecommunications facility; and
- C. Provide direction to staff on whether it is in the best interests of the department and the community to forward the item to City Council for further consideration.

DISCUSSION:

Background

Since late 2005, the Parks and Recreation Department has fielded requests from cellular companies to lease parkland for the purposes of operating a telecommunication facility. Requests have included Las Positas Tennis Facility, MacKenzie Park, and the Municipal Tennis Courts Facility. Staff has worked with cellular companies to evaluate the feasibility of each location in terms of the potential compatibility with existing and potential park and recreation uses. Staff has also coordinated with the Community Development Department and the City Attorney's Office to determine the various design and development review issues as well as City Charter constraints.

Section 520 of the City Charter requires an affirmative vote of a majority of the City Council and a majority vote of the City voters before land that is owned by the City and dedicated to park or recreation purposes may be sold, leased or encumbered. An exception to this requirement is made for permits and leases where the City Council finds that the proposed use is compatible with and accessory to the park and recreation uses of the property.

Specifically, City Charter Section 520 states that,

“No land acquired by the City for or dedicated to public park or recreation purposes and no beach property or public utility now or hereafter owned or operated by the City shall be sold, leased or otherwise transferred, encumbered or disposed of unless authorized by the affirmative votes of at least a majority of the total membership of the City Council and by the affirmative votes of at least a majority of the electors voting on such proposition at a general or special election at which such proposition is submitted.

This section also states,

“Concessions, permits or leases compatible with and accessory to the purposes to which the property is devoted by the City and which are permitted by contract from and regulated by the City shall not be subject to this paragraph.”

Ridge Communications Proposal

Ridge Communications, a contractor to Verizon, is specifically interested in obtaining a lease to locate and operate a cellular facility at the Santa Barbara Municipal Tennis Facility (Muni Tennis. Since February 2006, Staff has worked with Ridge Communications to evaluate 3 different potential locations at Muni Tennis. These include: 1) the landscaped area at the end of the parking lot that is between the courts and Highway 101, 2) the landscaped area in between the courts and Old Coast Highway, and 3) the Parks Yard to the east of the courts.

Ridge Communications has developed conceptual drawings that will be presented at the Commission meeting. The proposed project would include a building to house a generator and other necessary equipment. The building would be approximately 28 feet long by 12 feet wide by 9 feet high. Since the Municipal Tennis Courts are located within a flood zone, to ensure that the equipment would remain safe and operable in the event of flooding, the building would have to sit on piers approximately 11-12 feet higher than the surrounding elevation, resulting in an approximate 20-foot high elevation. A stairway and “cat walk” on two sides of the building would be required for access by Verizon personnel. The full height of the antennae assembly is between 50 and 58 feet depending on the location and consists of a 20-foot by 36-inch diameter antennae mounted on a 16-inch steel diameter pole.

Tennis Advisory Committee Recommendation

Staff reviewed the Ridge Communication proposal, and the 3 potential site locations with the Tennis Advisory Committee at their August 21, 2007 meeting. The Committee supported moving forward with the proposal and recommended that either the area between the

stadium court and Old Coast Highway or the Parks Yard be considered. The committee also wanted assurance that any revenue would be permanently committed to the Muni Tennis facility.

Staff Recommendation on Proposed Site Location

Staff recommends that the Parks Yard site be considered because it would not limit the opportunity to enhance the other locations for the recreational benefit of tennis players and surrounding residential neighborhood in the future. The Parks Yard would also place the facility further from the surrounding residential neighborhood. The Parks Yard is used for storage of materials such as mulch, top soil, boxed trees, and equipment. It is important to note that placement of the telecommunications facility in this area would impact park operations by reducing the size of the yard and could limit some future reuse of the area.

Potential Benefits to the Community and Parks and Recreation Department

City and Parks and Recreation Department staff rely on cellular telephones for communication out in the field throughout the business day. Many park and facility visitors rely on their cellular phones for routine and emergency communication.

Telecommunications companies continue to seek ways to improve services for users by addressing areas with poor cellular reception. It is becoming more common for cities, counties, and other jurisdictions to locate cellular telecommunications facilities in various park and open space settings where they are deemed appropriate for the specific facility and surrounding neighborhood. Generally, leases associated with such utility installations are 10 to 25 year agreements, providing revenue of \$25,000 to \$40,000 per year with an annual CPI adjustment.

The Department believes it is important to evaluate opportunities to generate additional revenue in order to provide much needed supplemental funding for annual maintenance and park improvements. The lease revenue should benefit the specific park or recreation facility in which the telecommunications facility is located. However, not all park areas are appropriate for placement of a telecommunications facility. Consideration should be made on a case by case basis given the park location, design, amenities, uses, and surrounding neighborhood areas.

Commission Discussion and Next Steps

The main issue for the for the Commission to consider is whether the lease of parkland for a cellular telecommunications facility can be considered compatible with and accessory to the use of Municipal Tennis Courts as a recreational facility. The Department would receive

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revenue from leasing the land which would be used specifically for maintenance and improvements at Muni Tennis.

The Commission's discussion and action will influence the next steps. If the Commission supports consideration of leasing land at Muni Tennis for telecommunications, Staff will forward the item to City Council for further consideration. If the City Council concurs with the Commission, the Department will work with Ridge Communications to further develop the design and negotiate lease terms. Any future facility would be subject to review and approval by the Architectural Board Review, Park and Recreation Commission, and the City Council.

SUBMITTED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director

APPROVED BY: Nancy L. Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director