



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: November 14, 2018

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Ortega Park Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission review the Ortega Park Master Plan and recommend to City Council that the Department proceed with advancing the preliminary design of the proposed park improvements.

DISCUSSION:

Introduction

The Ortega Park Master Plan (Master Plan) proposes to update the aging infrastructure at this 9.5-acre community park, which currently provides a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities. The existing park features and overall layout of amenities are in need of significant reinvestment to meet the community's growing need for safe, fun, and accessible recreational facilities. Through community workshops, site visits, and other public meetings over the past six months, the Master Plan evolved to include the following proposed facilities: a multi-sport synthetic turf field with lighting, a year-round non-competitive swimming pool with aquatic play features, a skate park, a basketball court and leisure activities area, an enlarged playground, restrooms, perimeter fencing and gates, and increased street parking and pedestrian enhancements.

The Master Plan represents a conceptual, yet cohesive, layout of park amenities designed to increase active use of the park. The City Council is tentatively scheduled to review the Master Plan in January and the Department recommends the Commission concur with staff to advance the preliminary design of the Master Plan.

Since the special joint Commission and Neighborhood Advisory Council meeting in August, the Department refined the preferred Master Plan design, including the pool, splash pad, pedestrian access, and orientation of the multi-use sport field. Two additional community meetings were hosted to gather additional public input and the revised Master Plan was presented to the Architectural Board of Review (ABR). The revised Master Plan that was reviewed by the ABR and presented at the second community meeting is attached to this report.

Master Plan Considerations

There are a number of consideration in advancing the proposed Master Plan that will be further evaluated and refined. These include how the park will be managed to meet the increased need for recreation space while providing equitable access to the new facilities and minimizing impacts to the neighborhood. In addition, a focused outreach and community engagement process is recommended during the next stage of design to create cultural and social gathering spaces and public artwork within the park.

Multi-Sport Artificial Turf Field

The existing natural grass turf field and the baseball field experience significant use from youth soccer leagues and PONY Baseball, respectively. In addition, youth lacrosse and rugby also seek play time on City fields. Since the current demand on the Ortega Park fields requires four months of closures throughout the year to rehabilitate the grass, expanding playable field time and drop-in use is not a viable option with the existing fields. A multi-sport artificial turf field with sport lighting has the most potential to meet the increased demand for sports fields, while simultaneously providing safe and consistent playing conditions year-round with limited maintenance closures.

Although artificial turf would provide year-round playing conditions, some current users and neighbors have expressed concern regarding increased competition for access to both drop-in and permitted, formal use of the fields. As part of the next phase of the project, the Department would develop an equitable system to coordinate and permit sports field access for both informal and formal activities. A similar approach was used when the Department was responsible for scheduling the Junior High Sport Fields from 2000 to 2014. The fees generated through permits would support park operations and turf maintenance. These fees would be developed through the annual budget process, and approved by City Council.

Neighborhood Compatibility

Several neighborhood compatibility concerns emerged from the public engagement process for the Master Plan. These include potential spillover of artificial lighting into neighboring residential areas, the likelihood of increased noise from evening events, skate park noise, and an increased demand on limited parking. In order to address these issues, the Department proposes several site design and operational approaches focused on minimizing potential neighborhood impacts. For instance, the park would only be open for use from sunrise to a half hour after sunset, and any activity proposed after the regular operating hours would require a permit. The Department would administer the permitting process for use of the sport field and lighting, and enforce the terms and conditions. After the park is closed, a proposed perimeter fence and gates would restrict access to the park, including the skate park.

In order to lessen the impact on limited available parking, the Master Plan includes modifications to increase the number of parking space along Salsipuedes Street and Ortega Street. Community input regarding parking also included developing other parking restrictions such as timed spaces, limiting non-resident overnight parking, and working with the Santa Barbara Unified School District to have shared use of the Junior High School parking lots during non-school hours. The Department will evaluate the feasibility of each of these options when the Master Plan advances to the next stage of design.

Cultural Spaces

Ortega Park is an important public space that fosters community through sporting events, picnics, and other social gatherings. The significance of Ortega Park as a cultural space, generally for Eastside residents, is a critical issue that will require focused community engagement to yield a successful design as the plan advances. The proposed central plaza and picnic areas, pedestrian promenade, and seating areas all have the potential to be designed in a way that embodies the history of Ortega Park. There are also existing murals that will need to be preserved or relocated if feasible. The installation of new murals and public art is also envisioned to be a key component of the next phase of design.

Next Steps

With Council direction to advance the concept Master Plan to a preliminary design level, the Department will focus on parking, access to and within the park, site specific technical studies, and further analysis of the preliminary designs for the various amenities. Key considerations will be community access, permitting requirements, feasibility, and cost

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

The current design contract with RRM Design Group for the public engagement process and Master Plan development is \$169,658. There is \$270,814 of General Fund available to advance the preliminary design and conduct technical studies. In addition, the Department is proposing to use \$146,363 of Community Development Block Grant funding to design the public right of way, and pedestrian and parking improvements.

ATTACHMENTS: Ortega Park Concept Master Plan & Perspective Views

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