



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: December 12, 2018
TO: Parks and Recreation Commission
FROM: Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department
SUBJECT: Dwight Murphy Field Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission review the Dwight Murphy Field Master Plan and recommend to City Council that the Department proceed with advancing the preliminary design of the proposed park improvements when funding is available.

DISCUSSION:

Introduction

The Dwight Murphy Field Master Plan (Master Plan) proposes to update the aging infrastructure at this 10.5-acre community park, which currently provides a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities. The existing park features 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 and fencing, youth baseball field, universally accessible playground, fitness area, restroom, 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 on January 29, 2019 and the Department recommends the Commission concur with staff to advance the preliminary design of the Master Plan, pending additional funding.

At the August 22, 2018 Special Joint Commission and Neighborhood Advisory Council meeting, staff received positive comments for the multi-sport synthetic turf field with lighting and fencing, fitness area, relocated restroom, and increased street parking and pedestrian enhancements. The Department received direction to work with the Gwendolyn Strong Foundation and PONY Baseball to refine the concept plan to include

a universally accessible playground and a youth baseball field that would best meet the needs of both stakeholders.

Since then, the Department worked with RRM Design Group and stakeholders to revise the concept plan and field layout to accommodate these amenities while retaining the other proposed park improvements. The revised Master Plan was reviewed by the Architectural Board of Review on November 5, 2018 with positive comments overall. The revised Master Plan is attached to this report.

Master Plan Considerations

Multi-Sport Artificial Turf Field

The existing natural grass turf field and the softball outfield 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 Dwight Murphy 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 sports 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.

Universally Accessible Playground and Youth Baseball

Retaining the north-south orientation of the existing multi-sport field created enough space to include a youth baseball field and a universally accessible playground in the eastern half of the park. PONY Baseball and the Gwendolyn Strong Foundation support the revised Master Plan since the baseball field is included in the plan and the playground is sited further away from the railroad tracks and US Highway 101.

The youth baseball field is sized for participants under 10 years of age. As such, it is a smaller field and provides an adequate safety buffer for playground participants. The baseball field includes a backstop and dugouts on the first and third baselines. A permanent homerun fence is not included in the design in order to allow other activities access to the natural turf area during times when baseball is not being played.

The universally accessible playground layout is very conceptual at this stage, but it generally includes a variety of playground equipment, paths, picnic areas, and an engaging design to appeal to all levels of abilities and ages. The proposed design and location also take advantage of the natural sloping topography of the park to capitalize on play opportunities and access. Pedestrian connections to the street level, crosswalk to the Zoo, and parking lot are all enhanced to allow for easier access to the park. The relocated restroom is sited closer to the playground, yet it also allows for access from the playing fields. With the next phase of the project, designers experienced with universally

accessible play will ensure the specific selection and layout of play equipment meets current codes, while still maintaining the charm and ingenuity of this unique playground.

Neighborhood Compatibility

During the development of the Master Plan, several neighborhood compatibility concerns emerged from residents at the adjacent El Escorial and East Beach Townhomes. These include potential spillover of artificial lighting into neighboring residential areas, an increased demand on limited parking, and the potential for increased noise from sports events and the proposed playground.

In order to lessen the impact on limited available parking, the Master Plan proposes several changes to increase the number of parking spaces. Along the western side of Niños Drive where it fronts the park, the plan includes changing the existing parallel spaces to angled spaces. The plan also includes the creation of a second parking lot near the northeastern edge of the park. It is anticipated there would be a higher number of disabled parking spaces at this location to accommodate users of the universally accessible playground. Community input regarding parking also included developing other parking restrictions such as timed spaces and limiting non-resident overnight parking. The Department will evaluate the feasibility of each of these parking options when the Master Plan advances to the next stage of design.

Currently, the softball field has artificial sports lighting, whereas the soccer field does not. Increased light spillover and noise can potentially be reduced by increasing the number of trees and landscaping along the park perimeter. Additionally, the field lights would only be used when a permitted event is scheduled at the park.

Next Steps

There are a number of considerations 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.

As part of the next phase of the project, the Department will expand the existing sports field permitting process for both informal and formal activities to include this location. This process ensures equitable use of fields amongst the various user groups.

City Council direction and additional funding is required to advance the concept Master Plan to a preliminary design level. If approved and funded, 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 parking and traffic flow, permitting requirements, feasibility, and cost. The Gwendolyn Strong Foundation is also committed to advancing the project and may be able to fundraise to help advance the design.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

The current design contract with RRM Design Group for the public engagement process and Master Plan development is \$139,215. There is no additional General Fund money available in the project account to advance the preliminary design or conduct necessary technical studies. The Department is proposing that \$500,000 be allocated in the FY 2020 budget to advance the project design.

ATTACHMENT: Dwight Murphy Field Concept Master Plan and Perspective View

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