

Planning begins to meet future park needs in Sunnyvale

By Cody Kraatz

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The city of Sunnyvale has kicked off an in-depth study of its parks and recreation offerings that it hopes will guide its open space planning for the next 20 years.

"Do we have enough playing fields and tennis courts--all amenities, every amenity you can think of--and if we want more, where do we want to put them?" said David Lewis, director of parks and recreation, summing up the focus of the study.

Nancy Kaiser, a consultant with Berkeley-based Moore Iacofano Goltsman, or MIG, outlined a plan to inventory the city's parks and recreational resources, survey residents to find out how they use parks, point out impediments to park usage and identify possible funding sources. MIG, hired by the Sunnyvale City Council in August for \$185,000, is expected to present its recommendations to the council in July 2008.

On Nov. 27, MIG began a 10-day series of 15-minute phone surveys of 400 random households, called at various times of day. A website is already up and running.

MIG, which conducted the Community Visioning Festival in 2006, promises to reach out to different age groups, ethnicities and neighborhood associations.

"We understand that not everyone can come to community meetings or council meetings. That's not where their comfort level is, so we will take the planning process to them," said Kaiser at a joint Parks and Recreation Commission and city council meeting Nov. 27.

Parks and Recreation Commissioner Howard Chuck said that outreach is important.

"In Sunnyvale there are a lot of Chinese who do tai chi in parks and they don't get very involved in things like this," he said, citing Ortega and Ponderosa parks, as hot spots. Chinese are culturally more low-key about civic issues, he said.

Councilman-elect Dave Whittum called for many more neighborhood parks during his campaign, and said his big concern now is how they are paid for.

"We're getting \$4 million per year in park dedication fees and we're not dedicating any parks," said Whittum, referring to the in-lieu fees the city collected from developers in the 2006-07 fiscal year. Developers can either build a park or pay the fees.

"I hope that we don't try to jump to a bond measure as a way of covering a budgeting shortfall that really should have been covered by being conservative with our finances."

The results of the nine-month study will be rolled into the existing open space and recreation sub-element of the city's General Plan, updated in January 2006, officials said.

"That was more strategic and policy-oriented," said Lewis of the sub-element update. "This is more tactical," and could recommend particular properties for purchase or renovation into better public spaces.

For more information, visit www.parksofthefuture.com.