

Focus groups looking at future of city parks

By Cody Kraatz

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Four focus groups met in March to provide guidance on a 20-year vision for the future of Sunnyvale parks and recreation. While not unanimous, invited participants shared many sentiments.

The focus sessions--involving city leaders, sports groups and arts and culture representatives--added to a phone survey conducted by the city's consultant, Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc. (MIG), in December. The participants included Pat Vorreiter, former mayor; Josh Salans, Sustainable Community Gardens; Holly Lofgren, Friends of Fremont Pool; and Audrey Wong, Arts Council of Silicon Valley.

Some of the ideas the groups proposed included a "hub and spokes" arrangement of parks and recreation with a central concentration of services and facilities coupled with smaller, neighborhood-oriented parks and connected by safe pedestrian and bicycle access.

"I think in general our consensus was that parks are really an essential part of the community, and whatever parks we can make available we should grab because we have so little land available in Sunnyvale," said Tara Martin-Milius, who represented the San Miguel Neighbors Association.

"We need places both for the larger community and for the neighborhoods."

Partnerships with schools and the business community were another recurring suggestion, and participants repeatedly called for services catering to seniors, toddlers, teens and the city's diverse ethnic groups.

One of the flash-points in the ongoing debate over the future of parks and recreation is the city's use of fees accepted in lieu of parks in new developments to maintain such revenue-generating facilities as the Community Center, the Sunnyvale Golf Course and Sunken Gardens Golf Course.

Most of the 407 residents surveyed said they do not use the golf course or think it is very important; 70 percent supported converting the 9-hole Sunken Gardens, on S. Wolfe Road near E. El Camino Real, into sports fields and a teen center. On the other hand, city staff would like to see the course become a "gem."

The groups acknowledged the need to balance free services with revenue-generating programs such as golf--the 18-hole Sunnyvale Golf Course generated a \$1.2 million

profit for the department in 2006-07--but neighborhood leaders insisted that this cannot come at the expense of small parks in dense neighborhoods.

Sports concerns included calls for a better facility reservation system, a reallocation of space based on need and a wish-list for sports such as gymnastics, swimming and cricket.

A final presentation to the Sunnyvale City Council of a report on the future of golf in Sunnyvale is set for April 29 in the council chambers, 456 W. Olive Ave. at the regular 7 p.m. council meeting.

/For more information or to read the reports, visit www.parksofthefuture.com and click on the Documents link./