



MEETING DATE: 6/6/05
ITEM NO. 13

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: JUNE 1, 2005
TO: MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL
FROM: DEBRA J. FIGONE, TOWN MANAGER 
SUBJECT: COUNCIL POLICY DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION REGARDING USE OF OAK MEADOW PARK FOR ORGANIZED SOCCER PRACTICE

RECOMMENDATION:

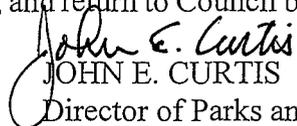
Council policy discussion and direction regarding whether to consider the use of Oak Meadow Park for organized soccer practice.

BACKGROUND:

At the December 20, 2004 Town Council meeting, the Town Council discussed a supply and demand analysis for soccer fields in Los Gatos. The key finding of that analysis was that while sufficient fields exist to accommodate Los Gatos Unified Soccer League (LGUSL) soccer games and recreational soccer programs provided through Los Gatos-Saratoga Community Education and Recreation (LGS Recreation), the supply of fields is not sufficient to meet the practice needs for LGUSL.

Council requested that staff develop a work plan for taking the next steps regarding the supply of soccer fields in Town. Based on Council discussion at the December meeting, the work plan brought to the Council retreat included three elements: 1) exploring the use of the large open area of Oak Meadow Park for practice soccer games; 2) exploring the installation of temporary or permanent lighting at one or more school soccer fields; and 3) exploring the interest in creating a task force to address the need for additional soccer fields.

At the January 29, 2005 Town Council retreat, the Town Council requested that staff collect data on the use of the large open area in Oak Meadow Park (to the extent possible given the winter and spring season weather), discuss the issue of the use of the area for organized soccer practice with the Parks Commission, and return to Council before the summer to discuss whether to consider the use

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Reviewed by: PSS Assistant Town Manager JK Attorney Clerk SC Finance
 Community Development Revised: 5/31/05 4:02 pm

of the area for soccer. Council indicated that if the decision was made at that time to consider using the area for soccer, that staff should conduct a full study of the use of the area over all seasons (particularly the summer and fall) to inform an eventual decision on using the park for soccer.

Regarding the other elements of the work plan, Council requested that staff explore the installation of temporary or permanent lighting at one or more school soccer fields. Council did not request staff to pursue the establishment of a task force at that time.

DISCUSSION:

Initial Discussion with Parks Commission

Staff had two discussions with the Parks Commission on this matter. First, at the April 5th Parks Commission meeting, the Commission discussed some of the considerations regarding allowing organized soccer to take place at Oak Meadow Park. Three issues emerged from the discussions: parking, field conditions and the impact on other park users. Commissioner comments are summarized as follows:

1. **Parking** - During much of the day and most of the year, the parking lot is filled or nearly filled with cars driven by people who are picnicking, walking, or playing frisbee or whose children are using the playground. Many of these park users have obtained a permit to use one of the eight picnic areas. The additional parking demand generated by soccer parents and fans could negatively impact the current parking situation, particularly on the weekends.
2. **Field** - There are times of the year when using the field would be problematic. This includes the rainy season when mud could be generated. There is an additional concern that the field may become "torn up" if soccer cleats are allowed. This suggests that the field should perhaps be available to the youngest age group only, presuming they do not yet wear cleats to play.
3. **Park Users** - There are already informal soccer practices in the field area, usually held by older players. This use is random and moves to different areas, having a lesser impact on the grass.

During the spring, summer, and autumn, the park operates at near capacity and picnic area reservations are at nearly 100% all of the time. On the weekends the field area is in use for more passive activities like frisbee tossing, picnicking, and walking. Adding soccer as a formal use may conflict with this current situation and it could change the character of the park.

The above comments represent the interest of the adult members of the Parks Commission, and generally speak to limiting or prohibiting soccer as an organized sport at Oak Meadow Park. The two student commissioners spoke in favor of playing soccer at Oak Meadow Park if there is a need for additional fields. Concerns about soccer practice in Oak Meadow were also raised by the Chair of the Parks Commission at the Council/Commission retreat on April 9th.

Use Data

Use data collected is both numerical and anecdotal, based on information obtained from park reservation records and reports from Parks Commissioners and the Parks Service Officers who are in the park daily. Given that the past winter and spring were very wet seasons, anecdotal information from this period is not representative of typical use of the open area of the park.

The table below indicates the use of the reserved picnic areas in 2004. A review of the records for the year shows that of the 427 reservations made, 37 required a special use permit because of the more complex nature of the event. Of those, 28 were for a jump house located on the grass in the open area. The majority of the reservations was for weekend use.

PARK RESERVATIONS - 2004

Picnic Area	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
Total		1	14	34	68	77	48	77	44	64	427

SPECIAL EVENT PERMITS - 2004

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
Total		1	1	5	5	8	3	5	4	5	37

JUMP HOUSES - 2004

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
Total		1	1	5	5	4	2	4	4	2	28

For six months of the year, May through October, the reserved areas are in nearly full use on weekends, both Saturdays and Sundays. During this time period, there was an average of 1.8 reservations per picnic area each weekend, which means that for six (6) months, the facilities were at an average of 90% capacity on Saturdays and Sundays.

The data indicates that using the open area for soccer on the weekends will likely conflict with other uses of the area. Staff does not yet have data or sufficient anecdotal information to indicate the use of the open area during the week in the "dry" seasons.

Second Discussion with Parks Commission

On May 3rd, the Parks Commission discussed the use of Oak Meadow Park for soccer practice for the second time. Ed San Juan, representing LGUSL, spoke about the status of soccer and the current availability of fields. He stated that there had been pressure to find playing fields with the current school renovations that are occurring at several local schools, but that fields have been found for all age groups.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Commission moved to recommend to Council that soccer be allowed in Oak Meadow Park only if the following specific conditions are met:

1. No cleats would be allowed.
2. The Parks Commission commented that girls may make less noise than boys when playing, causing less disruption to other park users; and thus, perhaps the area should be available only for girls under 10 years old. This condition would be discriminatory, and thus could not be implemented.
3. Soccer would be practice sessions only.
4. Two teams only would be allowed to practice at a given time.
5. Practices could only occur on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.
6. Play could occur from July to November 2005.
7. Teams would only be recreation league teams.
8. The grass areas used for practice would be maintained by the League at no cost to the Town, both during and after the season.
9. The turf would be initially prepared by the League, at no cost to the Town.
10. Any gopher issues or problems would be abated by the League, at no cost to the Town.
11. Soccer usage would be secondary to other planned usages of Oak Meadow Park for such items as special events which are scheduled in the park.
12. Arrangements for use of the parking lot and payment of parking fees would be made in advance of the practice sessions by the League.

The Parks Commission was unanimous in its approval to recommend soccer practice with these conditions. If these conditions were implemented in whole or in part, more definition would be needed (e.g., maintenance levels, initial turf preparation, process for approving use of parking lot, etc.).

CONCLUSION:

This reports presents initial data regarding existing use of Oak Meadow Park and the recommendations from the Parks Commission regarding the use of Oak Meadow Park for organized soccer practice. Staff seeks direction from Council as to whether Council would like to consider the use of the park for soccer practice. If Council would like to consider this, the following options could be pursued:

1. Allow the use of the open area for organized soccer practice, with certain conditions noted above and/or other conditions. Other conditions could include allowing the use on a trial basis this year, followed by an evaluation to determine if this use should be continued next year.
2. Direct staff to collect data regarding the use of the open area over the next six months and return to Council with the information for a discussion as to whether soccer practice should be allowed next year.
3. Disallow the use of the open area for organized soccer practice.

Due to other priority projects, staff has not yet explored the installation of temporary or permanent lighting at one or more school soccer fields. Staff seeks Council direction as to whether to undertake this work plan item. If Council directs staff to pursue this, it would be staff's goal to complete the review by the fall.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is not a project defined under CEQA, and no further action is required.

FISCAL IMPACT:

If organized soccer is to be permitted in Oak Meadow Park, all costs of operation from preparing the area before soccer to repairing the area after soccer will need to be underwritten by the organizations obtaining permits to use the area for soccer. Organized soccer has agreed that these costs to maintain the play areas would be underwritten by the League. The goal would be to have a net zero cost to the Town.