

New park would boost traffic, reduce farm land

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APTOS — Increased traffic and noise, and the loss of prime agricultural land are among the unavoidable adverse impacts should the county develop a regional park on the Polo Grounds in Aptos.

These were the conclusions of a draft environmental-impact report recently released on the long-proposed project.

The Polo Grounds, 61.5 acres near Highway 1 and the north-bound Rio del Mar Boulevard exit, was purchased by the county for \$2.7 million in 1987. It is so named because it once was a part of the large estate of pioneer Claus Spreckels, and was used as a race track and polo field through the 1920s.

The county is proposing to develop 40 acres into a regional park. It would include baseball and soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts, picnic facilities, an interpretive center, playground and 13,000-square-foot community center. The latter would include facilities for seniors and a 40-child day-care center.

Increased traffic and noise from such development are among the most significant environmental impacts on the adjacent residential neighborhoods, according to the environmental study.

Also, there is no proposed solution for the loss of 40 acres of prime agricultural land. Organic

vegetables are currently grown on the site.

The development would generate 302 peak-hour vehicle trips, according to the report. Major access for the proposed park is the narrow, residential Polo Avenue. The report maintains "significant operational and safety impacts" will be created, increasing the possibility of accidents between vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Additionally, "the new traffic, noise and loss of open-space views will significantly affect residents on Polo Avenue, North Drive, South Drive and the north side of Huntington Drive adjacent the park," the report says.

Proposed solutions to traffic problems involve widening Polo Avenue. However, widening would eliminate on-street parking and possibly take parts of some yards.

"Even if the roadway improvements were made, the considerable increase in traffic along this quiet street would be considered a significant impact on the local neighborhood," the report says.

"While this report identifies measures to decrease the severity of traffic, visual and noise impacts, they cannot be eliminated, and will remain as significant impacts," the report adds.

There is also no feasible lessening of the new traffic to Highway 1 that the project would generate.

Regarding noise, the report recommends such things as reducing

the number of activity areas in the proposed park, restricting use to daytime or lowering the speed limit on Polo Avenue to 20 miles per hour.

While the proposed project will dramatically alter views of the site, the change would not be visible from outside the immediate neighborhood, the report says. "Whether these visual changes are adverse must remain a subjective judgment," it adds.

Minimal environmental impacts cited in the report included wildlife/vegetation and hydrology/drainage. Public services, such as fire, police and emergency help, would also not be significantly impacted.

Written comments on the draft environmental-impact report are now being accepted, according to county Environmental Coordinator Pete Parkinson. County Parks Director Ben Angove said he hopes to have the final report before county supervisors for approval by November.

Angove estimated that developing the park will cost \$7 million to \$8 million, which the county does not have. He said the phased project would be dependent on a number of financial sources, including local fund-raising and state grants.

The county bought the site at the request of residents. In 1985, there was a development proposal for a retirement community on the property.