

# Using the Polo Grounds



Kurt Ellison

Miguel Baragas, left, and Ysidro Martinez hoe the cauliflower growing at the park site now.

## Little League, neighbors square off

By LANE WALLACE  
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The people involved in youth sports in Aptos want to see playing fields at the Polo Grounds, and the people who live near the 61-acre parcel don't.

There are other issues to be worked out at the park, which

Santa Cruz County bought in 1987 for \$2.5 million, but those are minor points compared with the playing fields.

The sports people favor three Little League fields in the park, which lies just east of the Rio Del Mar exit from Highway 1.

The residents accept the idea of a park, but they say the presence of playing fields would create traffic and noise problems.

Both sides have already voiced their feelings at two public meetings held by a citizen committee organized by the county.

The committee will hold several more meetings, after which the matter will go to

the county Parks Commission for more hearings, then to the Board of Supervisors for review, then to the county Planning Department for environmental review and development plans.

Even if everything goes as planned, it will probably be 1991 before final design can

# POLO

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begin and 1992 before development begins on the park, said David Mitchell, county parks superintendent.

Callander Associates, a Monterey consulting firm, has developed three possible master plans for the park.

Plan A, the most modest development, calls for open turf area but no formal playing fields, a 3,000-square-foot community center, and parking for 135 cars.

Plan B includes open turf area, two Little League fields, a concession stand, a 7,000-square-foot community center, and parking for 275 cars.

Plan C, the most extensive proposal, calls for open turf area, a 13,000-square-foot community center, three Little League fields, a concession stand, two sand volleyball courts, and parking for 450 cars.

All the plans include a playground, picnic area, meadow area, trails, a caretaker's house, and an "interpretive center." The interpretive center would be housed in a one-sided pavilion with a roof, and would feature displays and information about the plant life and history of the area.

The eight-member citizen

committee includes people on both sides of the spectrum, from the president of Aptos Little League to the residents of the area who have been involved in the push for a park without the baseball diamonds.

John Scott, the Little League president, said there are not nearly enough sports fields in Aptos to serve all the children who want to play Little League and youth soccer.

Little League is using Rio Del Mar and Valencia schools and Aptos Junior High, Scott said.

"Right now, we're maxed out," he said, and it will probably get tighter. The league has gone from about 250 players two years ago to 330 last year and 365 this year.

The Polo Grounds should be considered a regional park "and cater to the needs of the entire community," including providing fields, Scott said. Earlier this month, the Rio Del Mar Improvement Association endorsed Plan C.

Another member of the committee, Ray Talley, who lives on Huntington Drive near the parcel, said he and his neighbors favor a park, as long it called for limited use.

The neighbors banded together about three years ago, when the Ecumenical Housing Organization

(ECHO), a group of local churches, proposed putting a retirement community on the site.

But ECHO had to abandon its plans when the county designated the Polo Grounds as park land, effectively blocking any other development there.

Talley said he and his neighbors "were led to believe" by county officials that the park would be geared for casual, passive use. Based on that understanding, Talley said, the neighbors supported the park idea.

Because the Polo Grounds is a "natural amphitheater," Talley said, sound from the fields would be easily heard by the surrounding residents.

Traffic, Talley said, "is a major issue." He said Polo Drive, which most of the cars would use, is too narrow to support the kind of traffic Plan B or Plan C would generate. Huntington Drive is viewed as a secondary access road to the park in the current proposals.

Cars headed to the Polo Grounds would also be coming from the Rio Del Mar turnoff from the freeway. For cars turning left across the overpass, traffic is already "a mess," Talley said.

County officials agree that the interchange has problems, but don't think park development would add a sig-

nificant amount of cars there, said Mitchell of the Parks Department.

There is a mitigating measure in the works. The developers of the Seascape Benchlands will be required to put in traffic lights for both the northbound and southbound ramps. The Seascape project has already been through most of the review process, but hasn't received final approval.

Talley said the lights would help, but if there are scheduled games at the fields, there will be blocks of time when traffic will get especially heavy.

There's one other issue to be resolved: money. Plan A could cost \$3.5 million, Plan B \$5 million, and Plan C \$6.7 million.

At some point, the Board of Supervisors will have to decide how much to allocate for the park. There are various grants available for parks, Mitchell said, and the county would have to seek those grants.

The land is currently leased to Bruce Dau, who is raising vegetables there now with the understanding he will have to leave when the park is developed.

The citizen committee will hold a study session March 1 at 7:30 at the Aptos Village Park. No public testimony will be taken at that meeting.