

# Polo Grounds finally gets a master plan

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A master plan that calls for development of playing fields at Polo Grounds County Park in Aptos was approved yesterday by the Santa Cruz County Planning Commission with one key ingredient missing: money.

The county has owned the 62-acre site on Huntington Drive since 1987, but has virtually no money allocated for developing it.

Playing fields could be developed as early as 1996 if county supervisors find a way to pay for it, but the park could also stay undeveloped indefinitely, said Dave Mitchell of the county parks department.

The approval ends — at least for now — controversy that began in 1987 when the county bought the site on Huntington Drive, just east of Aptos Junior High School.

The county bought the land as a regional park site after at least three proposals for high-density development on the site fell through, partly because of community opposition.

Neighbors of Polo Grounds have expressed concern from the beginning about the traffic the park would generate, and continued to do so at yesterday's hearing. The planning commission action does not require another vote by the Board of Supervisors.

At first a passive-use park was

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proposed, but adult and youth sports leagues made a pitch for athletic fields at the park, and the fields became part of the plan.

Phase one of the Polo Grounds development, which will cost around \$2 million, calls for an access road off Huntington Drive, a parking area for 78 cars, two soccer fields and two baseball fields.

Commissioners said they'd like to see the fields developed as soon as possible. They said portable toilets can be used at first instead of permanent restrooms, and a temporary road can be constructed for access to the park.

Tennis courts, a basketball court, two more soccer fields and a Little League baseball field are included in the proposed second phase.

The third phase of Polo Grounds calls for a community center of 13,000 square feet, another source of irritation for residents. Commissioner Denise Holbert joined residents in objecting to the size of the building, and commissioners agreed to leave the size an open issue.

The second and third phases,

which will cost about \$5 million, will come back to the planning commission for review before they are constructed.

Money had been designated for Polo Grounds in the proposed Aptos Redevelopment Agency, but the entire proposal was dropped by county supervisors two years ago in the face of community opposition.

The public cost of building other county parks has been reduced by donations of labor and materials, Mitchell said, and could be done for Polo Grounds.

The vote for approval was 4-1 with Jim Hamlin opposed. Hamlin favored developing one field at first — as early as next year — even before the parking area is put in.

Santa Cruz County Supervisor Walt Symons said he will be looking for a "creative solution" for getting playing fields in his Mid-county district.

Symons, who last month asked the county Parks Department to come up with a plan for use of park sites in his district, said this morning he would like to see something developed at the Polo Grounds county park in Aptos as early as next year.

The county Planning Commission approved a master plan for development of the 62-acre site yesterday, but there is no money available for development.

Volunteer labor could help reduce the cost, said Symons. If something is developed next year, it would probably be a practice field, he said. "Even something would be better than nothing," he said.

The Parks Department doesn't envision any use before 1996.

Symons said he will keep looking for money in the budget that could be used for parks.