

Committee studies potential uses for village park

By CAROLYN
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Aptos residents who spoke Tuesday night before the Aptos Village Park Advisory Committee seem to favor one of two potential uses for the 7.5 acre site — either to develop it for informal and casual recreation, or for athletic activity on a scheduled basis.

Advisory committee members Richard Powell, Joan Fitzgerald, Ken Call, Brewster Burns and Chuck Holcomb, chairman, met with a handful of community residents to hear their ideas about future use and development of the

village park at 8021 Soquel Drive.

Larry M. Norris, director of the County Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services (POSCS) Department, and Neil Smart, department services manager, explained how suggestions will be incorporated into a master plan for the site that is included in the county parks system. The park has been a community project for more than a decade, and its clubhouse was constructed through the efforts of the Cabrillo Host Lions Club.

Each of the committee members gave their ideas

for the park that sits near the banks of Aptos Creek and the entrance to the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park. They generally agreed it would be redundant to leave the park totally in its "natural" state, since there is a 10,900 acre state wilderness park virtually next door.

Committee member Call suggested the needs of local schools be considered since available playing fields in the Aptos area are already overused. He also said he was discouraged that a good segment of the residential community — particularly Rio del Mar and Seascape — is unaware that the park even exists.

Chuck Solbach, vice-principal of Aptos High School, agreed that the grassy areas and playing fields are suffering from overuse. Both students and former students crowd the fields in off-school hours, he said, and there is a definite need for another grassy site.

Other members of the audience testified that the Aptos Park is already used heavily as a casual site for picnics and gatherings of young people. Smart agreed later in the meeting that high school students have made active use of the village park on a both "scheduled and unscheduled" basis, although there has been no provision for any organized sports activity.

Glenn Specht, Aptos Chamber president, said she is concerned as an individual that the park remain "casual." The formal playing fields

suitable for football, baseball and soccer, she said, are already booked to the limit at local schools and there is a need for more. "I support that need," she added, "But not here. A playing field won't fit."

Mrs. Specht said the Chamber has received calls from people who want the park to be kept for casual uses, a place to fly a kite or throw a frisbee, for example. The Chamber has also supported plans for paved parking at the top of the bluff and a paved road, as well as a limited number of parking spaces in the park itself.

She illustrated her comments with a map of the park, and showed how there could be a new improved walkway down into the park from the Pop Inn, as well as a possible walkway from the beach into the Forest of Nisene Marks Park that would pass over the park property.

She asked the advisory committee to plan for a "tot lot," for pre-schoolers, and added that it has been a longtime dream of hers "to build the longest, biggest slide," down the embankment.

Mrs. Specht also encouraged the committee to plan for increased use of the clubhouse building as a protection against vandalism.

Vandalism was a chief concern of both the audience and the committee members. Solbach told the advisory group the installation of a mobile home trailer to provide an on-site residence has proved

successful as a deterrent on elementary and high school campuses.

Leila Standal, operator of the horse stables across the road on Soquel Drive, mentioned occasions when young visitors to the park have caused problems for Aptos residents late at night. She suggested the park be opened only during the daylight hours.

Mrs. Standal also asked about the corridor that is supposed to be provided for horses through the park from Soquel Drive. A state proposed trail is to cut through the park under the bridge, she said, to a corridor of 200 acres in the Forest of Nisene Marks.

Don Geoffrey, a co-developer of the Biancalana property next to the park, said the village park should be regarded as a neighborhood park that will eventually serve the village's dense residential development. He suggested the park be reserved for the "everyday use," of young and elderly persons.

"The Aptos Village Plan calls for a totally self-contained environment where all the needs of a community can be met within walking distance," he said, "The park should be open for that use."

Geoffrey added that he would like to see Aptos Park as a "walk-on" site much like San Lorenzo Park in Santa Cruz, where space is provided for the activities of senior citizens as well as children.

Peter Carr said he would like to see the committee find a middle ground that

could incorporate both potential uses. He said it may be possible to provide a small playing field or practice field for sports activities, while the majority of the area is preserved for impromptu activity.

Smart ended the meeting with a description of the

park's present uses. Activities are scheduled on a regular basis, including 6-7 weddings and receptions per month. He said a rough count of the total number of people who have attended scheduled functions in the last three years is approximately 10,000 persons.

Among the organizations

that use Aptos Village Park on a regular basis are the Boy Scouts, a radio club, the Bluebirds, and the Lions Club. Smart added that a Lions Club member who lives nearby keeps an eye on the park to help cut-down vandalism, which has occurred but is so far "not extreme."

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