

✓ Polo Grounds likely to remain off limits this summer

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SANTA CRUZ — Hope is fading for people eager to play ball this summer on the long-anticipated Polo Grounds park.

The site that Santa Cruz County bought eight years ago will remain unused by teams while officials wrestle to find an access for people using the park.

"When is staff going to solve the problem?" asked Aptos Supervisor Walt Symons at the Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday night.

Frustrated after a 2½-hour hearing, Symons wondered if the park would be developed in his lifetime.

"We should be pleased these meetings are not televised," he said during the hearing.

Supervisors met Tuesday to discuss increasing the number of athletic fields in Aptos.

Players can use school fields in the area. The county owns seven fields in three of its five districts, but none in Aptos. The fields are at Brommer, Pinto Lake and Highlands parks.

About 40 people attended the hearing, including many parents who stressed the need for athletic fields in Aptos.

"The issue is playing fields, practice fields for kids," agreed Symons.

He and the other supervisors, however, found themselves unable to open the 60-acre property at the end of Polo Avenue off the Rio del Mar exit of Highway 1, even temporarily.

The conditions set by the county Planning Commission last year require developing adequate access and parking before the park is opened, said Dan Shaw, planning department director.

During intense questioning by supervisors, Shaw said the terms apply even if the site were used only temporarily as a practice field for Little League teams and soccer players.

Building a road from Huntington Drive is estimated to cost \$300,000.

County parks officials recommended issuing certificates of participation, a form of bond financing, to pay for the project. The annual debt would then be covered by increasing a county service fee by 83 cents a year for 30 years.

Supervisors said they will look at these costs during their budget hearings next month. Parks officials will also meet with youth baseball and soccer representatives as well as two Polo Avenue residents to continue searching for temporary access off Polo into the park, even though it might require returning to the Planning Commission.