

Council reprieves Garfield Park trees

By KAREN CLARK
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SANTA CRUZ — Public reaction to news that 19 healthy trees at Garfield Park were marked for removal has forced city officials to delay the project.

Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, who was among those upset about the scope of the project, said at least one community meeting will be conducted before any further action is taken.

"Clearly the reaction of the neighbors and wider community was such that it was important to take the complete plan of redoing the whole park to the community to get their input," said Beiers. "The master plan of the park looks good ... but we need to evaluate whether all those trees need to come out in order to meet the objective."

Even without the decision to conduct a community meeting, the city would have been forced to de-

lay removing the heritage trees because an appeal of the plan was filed Wednesday morning.

Westside resident Claire Jones said park neighbors donated the \$50 to file the appeal, which was turned in by Cynthia Berger.

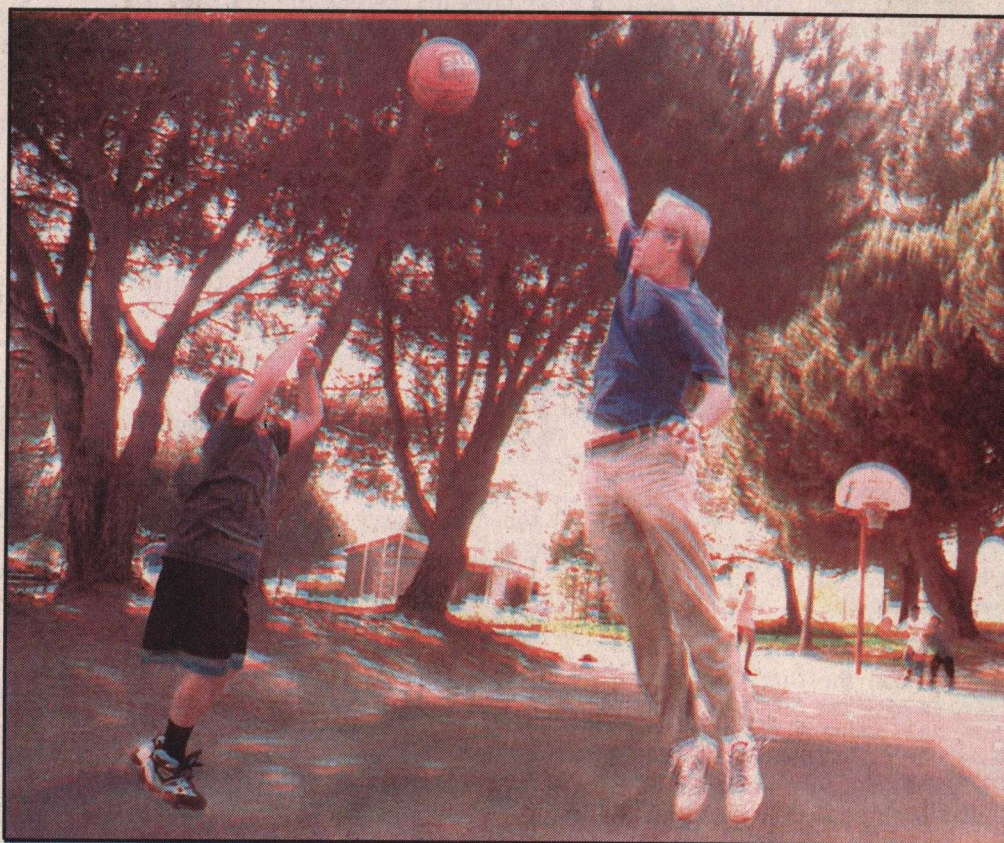
"It didn't take long for Cynthia to collect the money," said Jones. "A lot of people were opposed to the plan."

It isn't clear whether the appeal will proceed as normal to the Parks and Recreation Commission and then, possibly, to the City Council. Beiers said she had been told that would be the case.

But Jones said the city had refunded the \$50 filing fee because the decision to delay the project and conduct a community meeting meant the appeal period would be extended.

Parks and Recreation Department officials familiar with the issue were out of town Thursday

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Removal of well-liked trees at the Westside park has been postponed.

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and today, and could not be reached for comment.

At issue is a plan to remove 17 Italian stone pines, one liquid amber and one Japanese mayten from the park and replace them with three flowering cherry and four tulip trees.

The roots of the existing trees are breaking the surface in a myriad of places in the quarter-acre park. Officials said the roots are causing safety problems and are forcing breaks in the basketball court.

The tree-removal decision, which was approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission, is part of a \$95,000 master plan for the park that includes repairing and enlarging the basketball court, replacing the root-damaged sidewalk, enlarging the grassy area and upgrading the bathroom facility.

Removing the trees, however, was an idea that didn't sit well with people using the park on Thursday afternoon.

"I personally like the trees," said Dave Donahoe. "I like the shade; I

like the atmosphere."

Antonia Miano said people love Santa Cruz "because our parks still have trees. ... I think people would much rather deal with the roots and pay extra money to have the (basketball court) repaired every five years than to lose the trees."

Shannon Halblib said it's the shade from the unusually shaped trees that is one of the main reasons she likes coming to the park.

Park neighbor Katie Harper said there are more people who like to sit under the trees than who use the basketball courts.

"The park is a gem," said Harper. "Removing that many trees on the Westside, period, isn't cool. We're really, really aware of our environment. ... You don't just cut down 19 trees."

The strong community response took the council by surprise because members were unaware that staff planned to remove the trees.

"A lot of times we don't get something until it goes through the commissions," said Councilman Scott Kennedy. "It's not that unusual, (although) it's a little bit

awkward, to say the least."

Kennedy said, however, that staff members "didn't invent" concerns from neighbors about the thick trees providing convenient cover for illicit activity at night. That's one issue at the park that neighbors wanted the city to solve.

In fact, at an impromptu meeting with city staff at the park on Wednesday, there were neighbors who supported the master plan, including removing the trees, said Jones.

Mayor Cynthia Mathews said she also didn't know about the trees, noting that it's left to staff's judgment to give the council a warning in cases where controversy might rear its head.

"I don't think any of us are interested in micromanaging, (but) this did have the potential to be important to the community," said Mathews.

The date of the community meeting on the Garfield Park master plan, including removing the trees, has not been set. For more information on the issue, and to get on a mailing list to be alerted about meeting dates, call 429-3777.