

Park plan for Watsonville forwarded to City Council

The Planning Commission approved and sent to the City Council Monday night a "parks and recreation element" — a guideline to the city's parks and recreational needs, which is to be added to the city's General Plan.

"Basically, the element sets up a system for the council to provide for neighborhood parks," Recreation Director Pat Donohue said this morning.

She called neighborhood parks — those in the range of 5 to 10 acres — "the base of the city's leisure-service delivery system."

The General Plan does not now speak directly to the need for parks, other than to say that developers should be encouraged to provide areas for open space.

"As you look around the community, you see fewer houses with back and front yards," Mrs. Donohue said. "A neighborhood parks system provides that green space."

The element, put together by a special recreation advisory committee and already scrutinized by the Recreation Commission and Planning Commission, outlines official

city policies and objectives, and sets up a priority list as to how to meet those objectives.

The guidelines, as set down by the element, call for the city to:

- Develop neighborhood parks.

- Find a way to finance parks and recreational facilities.

- Encourage the development of school sites as park sites.

- Review facilities annually.

- Encourage developers to donate land for parks and/or private recreation facilities within their projects.

- Promote the use of land along creeks and sloughs for passive recreational purposes.

As for priorities, the element says "because of the urgent need for open space and the necessity to retain potential park sites that are still available, acquisition of the park land is of the highest priority...development is also of concern and should be dealt with quickly."

The element listed five potential projects as "top priority." They included:

- The acquisition of eight acres for a two-field softball complex.

- Additional tennis courts at Watsonville High School.

- The renovation of Ramsay Park. This would entail relocation of the lights from the two-court tennis complex to the three-court complex, permanent restrooms near the soccer field; and expansion of the parking facilities onto an adjacent, city-owned 3-acre site.

- The development of multi-purpose playfields at Rolling Hills Junior High.

- The acquisition of land in the Harkins Slough area for a tot-lot park.

The city, with the cooperation of the Pajaro Valley school district and the funding of several state and private grants, is currently developing E.A. Hall School. When completed, the site will sport a large turfed playing area, two Little League fields, a soccer field, tennis courts, a par course and restroom facilities with on-site parking.

There are an additional 12 projects further down the priority list, six of which call for development of existing school sites.

Mrs. Donohue said she was not sure exactly when the proposed element would go before the City Council.