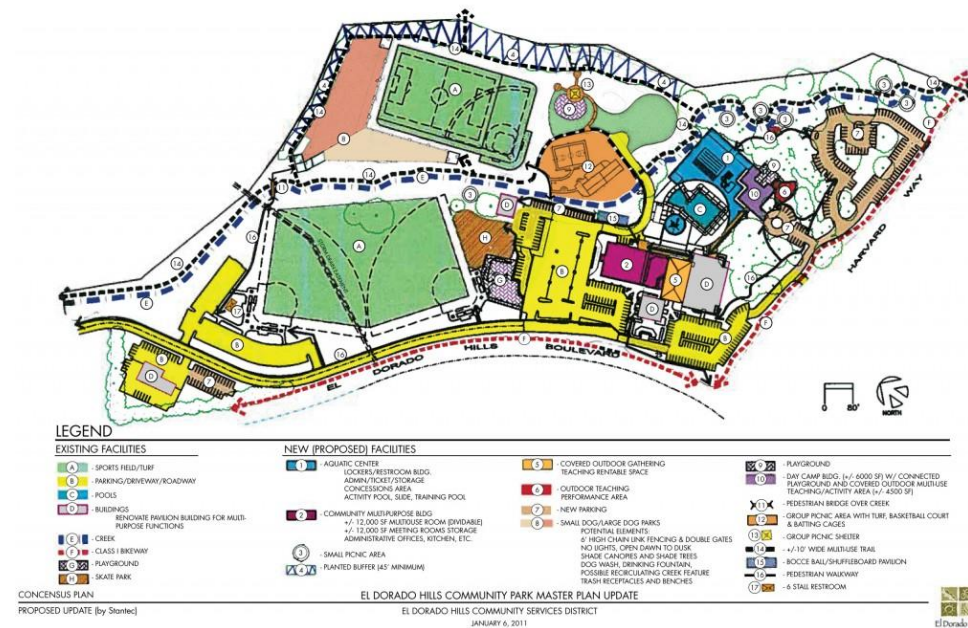


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CSD approves park environmental update



Community Park Master Plan

Dog park, basketball court, playgrounds and bathrooms in latest master plan update

The El Dorado Hills Community Services District Board of Directors adopted an update to the Community Park’s 2002 environmental report during a special board meeting and hearing last week, a prerequisite for future improvements to the park, most notably a dog park.

The Community Park’s master plan was revised in January 2011 to reflect planned improvements to the north side of the park including a 1.75-acre dog park, bathrooms and a bridge over New York Creek. The revised plan also includes a basketball court, batting cages, a playground and an additional picnic area in the east-central portion of the park.

Gary Matuzak, a senior biologist and environmental compliance specialist with Stantec, oversaw the environmental work, technically a “subsequent mitigated negative declaration.” During the Sept. 20 hearing he and project manager Kent Oakley explained the complex environmental

bureaucracy to the directors and a couple of concerned residents whose property adjoins the park.

The environmental update is a necessary prerequisite to change the master plan, which, in turn, is a requirement to apply for county permits and approvals to actually build or modify park amenities.

The final design of each proposed addition to the park will be subject to separate environmental and public review, as well as the county permit process. All improvements must also be budgeted and paid for.

“We’re not saying we’re going to build anything,” said Oakley. “We’re just saying we’ve done the studies so we can apply for the permits. There’ll be additional meetings on each of the actual projects as we design them.”

New amenities

Dog park — Separately fenced areas for large and small dogs, tucked into 1.75 acres in the northeast corner of the park, set 45 feet from the park boundary in a planted buffer zone. The outward-facing wall of the fenced dog area will likely include a sound-dampening material.

Bridge — ADA-compliant bridge over New York Creek will provide access to the dog park and the park trail system from the CSD’s north parking lot, located off St. Andrews Drive.

Bathrooms — A six-station “flush toilet” restroom structure located adjacent to the north parking lot. The area is currently served by porta-potties.

Basketball court — An outdoor basketball court in the central portion of the park, east of New York Creek.

Batting cages — Four additional pitching/batting cages near the basketball court, where one cage is currently located.

Playground — A playground and picnic area east of the new basketball court.

Picnic shelter — A group picnic shelter and adjacent turf area next to the new playground, near the eastern park boundary.

Eight tennis courts originally envisioned in the northeast and east-central area of the park area were removed from the master plan.

A parking lot in the northeast corner of the park was voted down by the board in 2009, but remains in the plan as a “placeholder,” according to board members. An improved bike trail along New York Creek also remains in the plan, and was a subject of concern with the Stonegate residents present last Tuesday night.

Trail

Footpaths run along either side of New York Creek in the south end of the park. Stonegate residents Andy Schildt and Jim Campo both have the easterly path behind their backyard fences. Both asked that the easterly path not be improved, noting that they've experienced vandalism and noise back there.

Campo thanked CSD maintenance staff for installing a gate on Harvard Way at the southerly terminus of the easterly path. Noise and vandalism are down, he said.

Schildt added that the path lacks the necessary clearance for the proposed 10-foot wide bike trail. Directors Bill Vandegrift and Tony Rogozinski volunteered to walk the trail with Campo and Schildt to get a better feel for the southeast corner of the park.

Campo opposed a parking lot in the area in 2009, and is still concerned that the board is "trying to cram too much into the community park," he said, suggesting that the CSD use whatever money is available to buy land and put new amenities, including the dog park, elsewhere.

Development fees that might allow the CSD to shop for park land are currently nonexistent, said Vandegrift, who stated flatly "Infrastructure investment off this site is not in the foreseeable future."

He recounted grim year-to-date building permit statistics that total just 18 new homes.

"We need to look at the parks we have," he said. "Projects like these give us good sports activities for a small investment. We've got no outside basketball courts in this park."

The board considered continuing the discussion until the hearing could be re-noticed, but decided to go forward since the actual projects would have to go through separate public and county review processes

Noise concerns

The CSD hired Bollard Acoustical Consultants to measure the potential noise impact of the dog park. El Dorado County's General Plan noise element allows 55 dB average noise levels during the day, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., with one-time noise events up to 70 dB. Noise limits are lower in the evening and nighttime.

The study found average ambient noise levels at the dog park site at the county maximum of 55 dB. One-time noise events were measured as high as 79 dB, but were traced to dogs in Stonegate back yards barking at the measurement team.

The acoustical consultants noted that the county doesn't provide any guidelines on how to measure the impact to residents of their own dogs barking.

By comparison, normal conversation at 5 to 10 feet is about 60 dB, according to the noise report. The noise level inside a commercial jet aircraft in flight is 70 dB. A diesel locomotive at 300 feet generates 80 dB.

The acoustical consultants also measured noise levels at area dog parks, and found that in several instances there was little to no barking, despite up to a dozen dogs playing in the park.

The engineers went to a kennel and used a car horn to provoke measurable barking. Their measurements demonstrated that several dogs barking in unison generate 55 dB at 200 feet. They extrapolated the measurements, concluding that the El Dorado Hills dogs might generate a 71 dB maximum at the nearest residence.

The report factors in the ambient noise, and concludes that the dog park wouldn't exceed county noise standards, with the exception of large dogs barking at the northern site boundary. Noise impacts were deemed "less than significant with mitigation incorporation" in the report.

The report recommends limiting dog park hours of operation to 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., to stay within the more flexible daytime allowable noise levels.

A 6-foot sound wall between the dogs and the houses would knock down some noise, according to the report, but would be expensive and could present safety concerns. The consultants recommended adding sound-dampening material to the outward-facing dog park fence instead.

Notification

Schildt told the directors that the letter he received from the CSD informing him of the hearing was missing some important pieces.

Campo said he was "completely blindsided" by the notification" and wondered why the board didn't publish a notice in Village Life. "No one in Stonegate knows this meeting is happening," he said.

Oakley explained that the district wasn't legally required to contact each resident, and that a legal notice published in the Sacramento Bee fulfilled the district's obligation.

Vandegrift defended the process, explaining that changes to the park master plan have been discussed in last two Parks and Planning Committee meetings, and the proposed dog park — a big reason for the plan update — is discussed regularly at monthly board meetings.

Oakley committed to letting Stonegate residents know what transpired, what's to come, what the process is and where they can see the details.