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Print Date: Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Last modified: Wednesday, February 7, 2007 8:59 AM PST

Residents uneasy about park lighting

By: Cheri March

It may be high-tech, but the new sports field lighting at Promontory Community Park still has nearby residents worried.

A recent test of the lights proved a bit bright for homeowners like Marian Cohen.

"They promised no light spill, but my son's bedroom is lit up," Cohen said.

She also expressed concerns about safety, explaining the light interferes with the eyes of drivers on adjacent hilly streets.

The sports field lights are only part of the recently constructed phase 1 of the community park, which includes baseball diamonds, an all-weather soccer field with artificial turf, tennis and bocce ball courts, picnic areas, and a play area.

There are 15 light poles surrounding the park, providing a total of 86 lights. The technology is known as "dark sky" lighting, and is meant to minimize impact by only shining on essential areas, like ball fields.

Though phase 1 is nearly complete, the El Dorado Hills Community Services District is making a few last minute adjustments.

"What we're looking at tonight is the angle of the lights and whether they cause glare," explained CSD general manager Wayne Lowery. "The goal is to have the best playing fields we can with the least impact on residents."

CSD is currently trying to minimize lighting during periods of non-use. Lights are scheduled to turn off no later than 10 p.m. Groups using the park will be given a code to shut the lights off earlier. The light timer is computerized and will be managed by remote control.

Director of Parks Kent Oakley said the lights were designed to meet certain light output standards.

"We're measuring to find out if they're correctly installed and meet what the county approved," he said.

The lights were installed pre-adjusted and an electrical engineer was on hand during the test to monitor them. Oakley said if a problem occurred, the manufacturer would fix the lights at no additional charge.

Another purpose of the test was to get resident input and see what, if anything, will need correction, he said.

But the lights are just one hot-button issue with many Promontory residents, who believe the entire park caters too much to adults and required unnecessary amenities and expenses.

Promontory resident James Jory wanted CSD to make "finishing projects they've started a top priority."

"Our homeowner's disclosure was for a youth-oriented park - that's not what we got," he said.

Phase 2 calls for a passive, rather than active, play area, which would include grass, family-gearred picnic tables, and a play area for young children.

Jory said \$800,000 in cost savings could exist for phase 2. The next phase will be discussed by CSD at an upcoming workshop.

He was also concerned about the lights, or, more specifically, what they could bring.

"Lights enable noise, and we'll have to deal with it constantly on evenings and weekends," he said. "A park like this should be by the freeway or a business park, not here."

"For me, it's decreased the value of my house considerably," said nearby homeowner Lisa Tilley. She explained she liked the idea of a park, just not on such a large scale. "We hope that everyone that plays is considerate and well mannered, because we don't have curfews up here in El Dorado Hills."

Marian Cohen, who was concerned about light spill in her home, admitted the lights might just take some getting used to.

"I used to live in Davis (by the similar Playfield Park) and I liked the park, but it took about a year to wait for trees to grow and to get used the noise; we had to adjust."

The lights will be used an average of 400 hours a year at an hourly cost of \$13.45, according to a manufacturer estimate.

Annual usage is estimated at \$5,380; annual maintenance cost at \$860.

Additional light tests are scheduled, according to CSD.

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