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Resident, parks chief spar over district plan

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In the following, James Jory, of El Dorado Hills, weighs in on Promontory Park. Wayne Lowery, general manager of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District, responds to Jory's concerns.

I am writing this to address the many false and misleading statements published in the Nov. 30 El Dorado County Community Watch ("Mom asks: Where's playground?").

In paragraph eight, Wayne Lowery was quoted as saying that the largest playground planned for the park will be built in phase one. This is false. The playground area in phase two is approximately three times as large as the one in phase one. This is clearly evident in the detailed park plans (which I have personally viewed). Wayne, I would be happy to meet with you to go over the plans again if you feel that I am misunderstanding them.

Lowery responds: James, you are correct. During the early design discussions for Promontory Community Park, when phasing construction became a possibility, the recommendation was to have the largest play area in Phase I. At some point, the architect realized the available space for the playground was too limited and it was sized down and I guess I missed that change. When I learned this Thursday (11/30/06) I talked with (Bee reporter) Cathy Locke and she offered to print a correction in the next issue (Editor's note: See this week's Community Watch on the cover).

Jory continues: In paragraph nine, Lowery was quoted as saying that the playground (in phase I) "will be as big or bigger" than what is at the CSD Community Park. This is false. I personally measured the play areas at the CSD Community Park and the play area under construction in phase one of the Promontory Park. The total area of the play areas at the CSD Community Park is approximately 7,530 square feet and the total area for the play area at the Promontory Park is 3,421 square feet. That makes the CSD park's play area more than twice as large as the one at the Promontory Park. Note: For my measurements I included all bark-filled, sand-filled, and rubber-matted areas in each park. Wayne, if I am misunderstanding your interpretation of a "playground," please clarify. Also, I would be happy to share my measurements with you or meet with you at both parks with a measuring tape.

Lowery responds: Again, you are correct. All of our staff involved with this project assured me -- even as recently as last Thursday -- that the size was the same or larger than the EDH Community Park play equipment but, obviously, that is not the case. Phase two will include a very large play area -- largest in the district, even excluding the proposed spray ground.

Jory continues: In paragraph 10, the so-called "individual picnic areas" in Phase I are not picnic areas at all. Instead, these are a few tables in a concrete area between the adult softball field, adult soccer field, and tennis courts. There are no grills and no passive park features, which are typically associated with picnicking.

These tables will be more useful to the spectators of the multiple sports fields than to picnickers. In addition, the actual picnic area planned for the Promontory Park is part of phase two. Again, Wayne, if I am misinterpreting the detailed park plans, I would be happy to meet with you to go over them.

Lowery responds: The individual picnic areas are the tables you describe. They are there for picnickers using the play equipment as well as sports field/court users.

Jory continues: In paragraph 12, Lowery states that the soccer field will serve both adults and youths. What is not being addressed is (reportedly) that the youth (fields will) be for (private) competitive soccer only and not for the recreational soccer league that so badly needs more fields.

So far I have been unable to confirm this with the youth soccer league. They have not replied to my

request. Wayne, perhaps you will have more luck with them and report back to us. Note: I have two daughters who play recreational soccer in EDH with a third starting next season. It would certainly be a shame if the largest soccer league in EDH (recreational soccer) did not have access to this field.

Lowery responds: The larger softball diamond is for adult use; the smaller field for youth. We anticipate having adult soccer on the large field several nights a week after youth soccer has finished. Youths will have priority use on this field. We meet annually with all the youth sports groups and let them work out the scheduling priorities for each field so I cannot tell you what recreational, select and comp soccer's use will be. That will be their decision.

Jory continues: In paragraph 14, Lowery states in the first sentence that the second and third phases are not listed in the district's five-year capital improvement program. But then in the second sentence he says that the fact that they aren't specified doesn't mean that they are on or off the five-year list. Which is it? On or off? Please don't give us political double-speak. The fact is that phases two and three were top priority projects and were only recently taken off the list.

Lowery responds: The Five Year Capital Improvement Plan includes the Promontory Community Park but does not indicate any phases. The amount budgeted in the CIP, however, is only the amount that the first phase will cost. When the board conducts its annual review (usually late spring), they will need to address the priority funding for completing the park. This is why the second and third phases do not appear on the CIP.

Jory continues: Paragraph 15, the recent meeting that Wayne refers to here was a "special board meeting" held on a Saturday morning and not part of the regular board meetings. Prior to this meeting, phases two and three were top priority projects. Yet on that Saturday morning at the "special board meeting," the board decided to ditch phases two and three with the justification that they had already spent too much money on the park.

Promontory residents feared that this would happen when the board decided on a phased approach. As is clearly evident by my corrections above, the board went on a shopping spree with our fees and built what they wanted and are abandoning what the neighborhood desires and so badly needs.

Lowery responds: The board holds a regular board meeting on the second Thursday of each month but it is not unusual that several special meetings are held at other times during the same month. Because of schedule conflicts, these meetings vary in time/date depending on individual director availability so we can have maximum attendance.

A topic such as reviewing our strategic plan can take several hours and it is, therefore, prudent to schedule the meeting on a day other than the regular meeting that typically requires several hours to conduct on a variety of topics. As you can see on our Web site, it is not unusual to have two to three special meetings in a given month in addition to the regular meeting.

The board scheduled three hours on Saturday, Oct. 7, for this purpose. The agenda for special meetings are always posted at least 24 hours in advance on the CSD kiosk (next to the Pavilion), at each fire station, and faxed or e-mailed to local newspapers. In addition, we post the agendas on the district's Web site (www.edhcsd.org) and e-mail it to those who request us to do so.

Jory continues: What should have been reported is that it is a sad fact that many neighborhoods in EDH do not have neighborhood parks. Several neighborhood park sites have been left by the CSD for years as weed-infested eyesores.

A 42-year resident of El Dorado Hills has been pleading with the CSD at the last few board meetings to finally build the neighborhood park promised in his village. The track record of the CSD in not meeting the needs and commitments of neighborhood parks is indefensible. The CSD claims that they simply do not have the money to build these parks and that park impact fees are the answer to getting parks built in new neighborhoods.

Well, the Promontory was the first neighborhood in all of El Dorado Hills to pay park impact fees and the CSD is doing the same thing to us as they have done to the neighborhood of that 42-year resident. Except what they have done to us is even worse. They erased our neighborhood park in a specious land swap and took all of our fees and borrowed \$5 million more to build a sports complex.

Lowery responds: The (impact fees) began in 1997 several years prior to the sale of lots in Promontory and many neighborhoods have paid these fees. Prior to having this fee in place the district had limited financial resources to construct parks and for many years shared the frustration you feel of wanting to build new parks but with the financial capability.

Now we have a development fee and it has been in place long enough to actually accrue enough money to build parks. Several, in fact, were built in the last few years (Lindsey, Kalithea, Creekside, Murray Homestead, Fairchild, and Laurel Oaks). Two older parks were upgraded from several funding sources (Bertelsen and Harris). Promontory, of course, is under construction. Two new facilities were build this year (Maintenance Center and Teen Center/Skate Park).

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