

Los Perales Gains a Library ...but loses a playground

By Lee Borrowman



Los Perales, under construction

Photo Andy Scheck

Excavation began two weeks ago at the site of Los Perales Elementary School's new library. The construction of the library is part of a successful package bid by Rodan Builders. At a cost of 1.1 million dollars, both Los Perales and Camino Pablo will see new facilities. The Los Perales library building will include two student bathrooms, a conference room and offices, and Camino Pablo students will enjoy four new classrooms. The new facilities will include covered walkways.

Los Perales administrators have implemented several measures intended to ensure the safety of students during the construction process, which is scheduled to be completed in February despite the imminent arrival of the rainy season.

As the fencing went up and bulldozers started tearing into the surface of what was formerly known as the Panther B Playground, a couple of civic-minded fourth-graders were circulating a petition amongst the student body requesting that a replacement playground be constructed. The petition echoes the opinion expressed by the Los Perales PTA's Executive Committee in a letter sent to the Superintendent and Governing Board on September 12, stating that although a new library was important for Los Perales, library construction should not move forward without a playground plan. The Board voted on Sept. 18 to proceed with the construction of the library, but not with plans to build a replacement playground.

Los Perales has been waiting for years for its new library. The project had fallen victim to costly delays and miscommunications. The architect's design included a new playground, which was to be built into a hillside on the south side of the school. When the bids came in at between 2.3 and 2.7 million dollars, everyone balked. The district quickly requested revised bids that excluded the playground, and subsequently accepted the lowest bid. Superintendent Richard Shafer explained, "We just don't have enough money to build a million dollar playground." The price tag of the proposed playground caused some to wonder why the district was unaware that the cost would be so high even though the design had been prepared by the project's architect two years ago.

The PTA is concerned that LP was already far below the other schools in terms of the amount of usable playground space available. Shafer said, "The LP site is one of the most difficult I've ever seen in terms of space. It sits on a hill and is closely surrounded by homes."

In its letter, the LP PTA told the Board, "The goal of upgrading the library is to bring LP up to an equitable position compared to the other Moraga elementary schools, but improving one aspect (library size) by degrading another (playground space) does not accomplish the goal. If construction is begun without a

complete plan, it is likely to leave LP in a permanently inequitable position, with a larger library but sub-standard playgrounds and no way to fix the problem."

The minutes of the Sept. 18 Board meeting read, "In as much as construction costs continue to rise, the Board believes that awarding the bids would not preclude a solution for replacing the LP playground space appropriated by the new library."

The Board asked Shafer to convene a committee to "research and recommend alternative sites for improvement of the playground area." The committee, which includes Shafer, LP administrators, teachers, parents and the project architect, will be presenting its recommendations to the Board on Oct. 23.

The financial resource for the current facilities work is the district's \$3 million allocation from the bond fund. It is not known at this time when the Board might vote on an alternative playground plan or how much money might be made available for such a project. Interested parties are encouraged to check the Board's agenda on-line at <http://www.moraga.k12.ca.us/>.

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