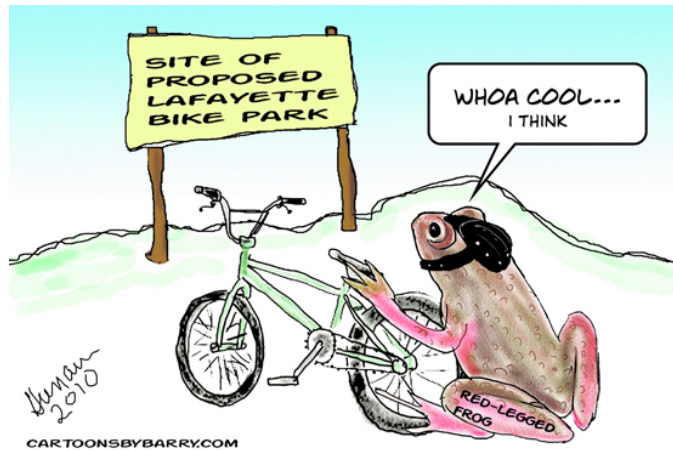


Published February 3rd, 2010

Council Takes Step to Investigate Bike Park Feasibility

By Cathy Tyson



www.cartoonsbybarry.com

environmental analysis in a four to one vote.

"There is still a lot of process before the design is finalized," Russell continued, explaining that the goal of the meeting was just asking to approve the proposed environmental review budget and to gage Council support.

The area being considered for the bike park, the south end of the Community Park, was designated for active use in the 1988 Community Park Master Plan. It's also the only property owned by the city with the necessary infrastructure: parking, water, restrooms and emergency access. Currently local youths build unauthorized bike jumps along the sensitive Las Trampas creek bed.

"The primary objective is to receive from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service necessary authorization under the Federal Endangered Species Act for impacts to the California Red-legged frog," said Russell in a statement. "The first step will be to obtain a permit through the Army Corps of Engineers and a streambed alteration agreement from California Fish and Game and water quality certification from the Regional Water Control Board."

With support on both sides of the issue - pro and con - a packed house sat through a significant amount of public testimony before the Council rendered their decision. Supporters included the Lafayette Youth Commission and the Lafayette Community Center Foundation. Proponents argued that children need the exercise, time outdoors away from television and computers. "It's a healthy thing," said Brian Cochran, father of young bike enthusiasts. "I don't feel unsavory - it's how I paid for my house in Lafayette," said professional adult rider Forrest Arakawa, "please don't stop the process now."

In a letter to the Council, Geoffrey Bellenger commented, "For those who do not want to be part of the organized activities, there is considerable room to roam in the North End, as well as the middle section of the Park. When I am in the South End, I love all the people and sports activity. This is what a Community Park is for: it's not just open space reserved for the Burton Valley folks."

Opponents of the park were concerned with detriment to the environment - that a park is not in line with the goals or values of Lafayette, liability issues, supervision, and attracting an unsavory element to Lafayette. "It is unfathomable that this city would want to spend \$100,000 just to get permission to kill animals, cut down trees, permanently destroy vibrant plant and animal habitats and turn a beautiful and treasured place into a barren wasteland," said April Sommer in her remarks to the Council. She continued, "The City should be thrilled to be the stewards of this fabulous endangered species - the California Red Legged Frog is a species of great scientific and historic significance."

"What terrifies me is the liability," said Ann Burns. John Sween said, "What bothers me is the merits of the process. How much are we going to spend before we decide if the community backs the bike park?"

In 2008 there was an estimated project budget of \$105,000 for design, environmental review and preliminary grading and fencing. Due to additional environmental reviews and permitting the project is now expected to cost \$250,000. These funds come from park fees and donation, not city general funds. The park fees can only be used for park and recreation improvements.

Testing the waters to check on support for the proposed bike park project and securing additional funds to continue with the permitting process, Parks Trails and Recreation (PT&R) Director Jennifer Russell made her case to the City Council last week. A standing room only crowd filled the Community Room to voice their support and opposition to the proposed bike park.

"Parks Trails and Recreation would like the City Council to move forward so we can hire an environmental consultant to get regulatory permits," said Jennifer Russell, PT&R Director. Due to the finding back in 1994 of one California Red-legged Frog in Las Trampas Creek, project consultants "informed the PT&R Commission that special permits and additional studies would be required in order for the project to proceed," stated a January 25 Staff Report. Now PT & R is asking the Council for \$21,785 to hire an environmental consulting firm to do the obligatory analysis.

It's a bit of a chicken and egg situation, although the City Council has not been given final design plans, they have seen conceptual plans; but in order to see if the bike park would be possible in its proposed location a professional environmental review is necessary. After much heated discussion and public input the Council voted to pay for the

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA