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Wilder Playfields: Timeline Changes Proving Costly

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Photo Andy Scheck

The Orinda City Council learned at its final meeting of 2011 that milestones continue to be missed and met as the new Wilder playfields grind on toward completion.

"Substantial progress has been made toward completing Playfields 1 and 2 yet they remain unfinished and construction of the maintenance facility has not yet begun," according to the staff report.

Those delays are adding strain to an already stressed budget. By the City's calculations, Orinda is losing roughly \$30,000 for every quarter that the playfields remain undone - a projected minimum net loss set to reach \$120,000 based on a new estimated playfield delivery date of June 1, 2012.

The good news is that the developer, OG Property Owners, LLC (OGLLC), is offering "to make the City whole for this loss in income" by upgrading the planned Maintenance Facility - "the actual and reasonable cost of which will be determined with staff once the final design and installation is complete" - and paying "the City the difference upon transfer of Phase 1 of the fields to make the City whole for lost revenue and rents."

Staff has requested a new timeline from OGLLC listing

milestone dates originally set by the City, their current completion status, explanations for the delays, and a revised schedule for finishing the outstanding project components.

The Mixed News

Light poles at the playfields are now up and functioning. It is estimated that PG&E will deliver power permanently by the end of January. Lower parking area lighting is also scheduled to be completed by this time. A study will verify that City specifications for lighting at ground level have been met.

Mowbands and curbs were installed by October 6th, as was the under-playfield installation drainage.

Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu reported that water meters are also now installed. A fire flush inspection must still be completed by the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the Moraga Orinda Fire District.

Council members peppered staff and the developer with questions regarding whether or not drinking fountains will actually be operational by January 2012.

Scott Goldie, a partner with Brooks Street, the firm handling sales and marketing for the Wilder project, stated that the drinking fountains were operational. When asked how this was possible since the installation of the sanitary sewer system is not yet finished, Goldie confused listeners when he said that anything requiring sanitary system hookup would not be usable until that system is finally completed.

Mike Stallings, Interim Parks and Recreation Director, clarified: The drinking fountains and bathrooms are not yet connected to the sanitary system and will likely not be operational in January.

Several aspects of the project are expected to be finished by June 1, including the Quercus Creek restoration, now 90 percent complete, and the construction of the maintenance facility. The picnic, barbeque areas and tot lot are nearly complete.

The playing surfaces and fencing for both fields are ready; however, staff asked the developer to make more than 25 safety and aesthetic improvements, detailed on pages 5-7 of the staff report, which is available on the City's web site: www.ci.orinda.ca.us/.

The largest point of contention was the developer's request to modify the original plan, which called for a bridge over Quercus Creek linking the lower and upper parking areas to allow "two-way car access, pedestrian and ADA access between Field 1 and Field 2." Instead, developers hope to build a "culvert crossing due to cost, appearance and maintenance/replacement costs."

According to the original Development Agreement (DA), "OGLLC is required to bridge creek crossings." Those bridges must "be 'clear span' and subject to City review."

Staff was given a preliminary design of the newly proposed culvert. Advising Council members that this plan could work but would require amendment of the DA, staff asked "that in exchange for the requested modification, the developer reinstate the pedestrian path and bridge alignment with a more direct access between Playfield 1 and 2."

The developer pointed out that "the approved improvement plans do not include a separate pedestrian bridge," and offered to complete the upper parking lot, associated trailhead parking, and vehicular creek crossing by this summer rather than June 2013 if the Council agrees to the culvert crossing.

"Our motivation is very much in opening these fields," said Goldie. "We're just here to provide a first-class

playing facility for the City."

Council members advised staff that more information was needed before they could consider modifying the Development Agreement.

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