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Creating a Master Plan for Moraga Commons Park

By *Sophie Braccini*

Moraga Commons Park may be at the center of town and of many people's recreational lives but there is still room for improvement according to Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram, who wants to maximize the potential of this town asset. He would like to create a Master Plan for the park, but his tight budget presents an obstacle to achieving that goal. So, Ingram is starting to work with Cal State East Bay professor Chris Chamberlain and his team of students. This partnership will allow the director to accomplish at least part the job for free, a very fashionable and functional adverb for a city that prizes minimum government-and budget.

"There are a number of issues regarding the park where we'd like to have residents' opinions," says Ingram. He believes that the acreage known as the "back forty," which is the north side of the park that's mostly undeveloped, is underutilized. In addition, "The bocce ball users want to add more courts, and the volleyball sand pit turns into a lake after a heavy rain," he explains.

The back forty is currently part of the disc golf course and the uneven ground makes it inappropriate for most other uses. Bocce ball users have been growing in number but finding a new site that would not require grading, or impact other activities, is more challenging than expected. The sand volleyball court no longer gets a lot of use and Ingram believes that its central location could be put to better use-especially during big events such as the Pear and Wine Festival and Fourth of July celebration.

Ingram says he also gets requests from residents who want to use the park for new activities, and he needs a vision of how the space can be adapted to best respond to increasing demand. In order to plan for the future, he also needs to have accurate data on current participation rates for park activities and resources.

"I met with Professor Chris Chamberlain. These kinds of studies are ideal for students and he's already done this with many Bay Area cities," says Ingram. According to his biography, Chamberlain has been "creating community" in the recreation field since 1988 and has served on the faculty in the Department of Leadership in Hospitality and Leisure Services at Cal State since 2005.

The complete scope of work will be defined in cooperation with the Park and Recreation Commission, and is likely to include public outreach, an assessment of current use pattern, and defining the path forward to maximizing the park's potential.

The commission will be asked in January to decide on the first phase, including the number of community meetings, polling questions, marquee displays, community park walks and other community outreach opportunities. "After a draft plan is approved, we'll hire a consultant to budget the different options," says Ingram.

He expects that the Town Council will make final decisions regarding Commons Park towards the end of 2013.

Lots of Mud

Construction of the new parking lot by the skate park has been delayed due to the heavy rains of the last several weeks-crews can't pave over mud. But the new fence, made of recycled rail material, has been erected and a bioswale and other drainage improvements have been added. The contractor will complete the grading and paving of the parking lot once the ground dries out, according to the town's website.

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