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Plans for Protecting Community Park this Summer

By Cathy Tyson

"We're looking at ways to avoid what happened last year - it was an unusual summer with two fires in the Community Park," said Mark Poole, Chair of the Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission, about the focus of a recent meeting. The 68-acre park in Burton Valley has sports fields and playgrounds, but also lots of woodland areas and Las Trampas Creek that seems to entice local teenagers to hang out.

The commission, along with Lafayette Police Chief Eric Christensen and the Contra Costa Fire District Battalion Chief Dominic Ciotola, met to proactively discuss preventative and enforcement procedures for the park this summer.

Parks, Trails and Recreation Director Jennifer Russell started the ball rolling with a sign that contained what she called the "Reader's Digest" version of rules and regulations that is posted throughout the park. "We are trying our best to get the word out, before school is out for the summer." She also had notification boards spelling out what to do in case of a mountain lion sighting, information on West Nile Virus and others that are posted as needed.

"If there's a security issue, that's my problem," said Christensen, who started the job in April of last year and admitted there was a bit of a learning curve about policing the park initially. He assured those in attendance and the commission members that he has re-arranged personnel so there's an officer assigned to the Community Park during key problem time frames - usually Friday and Saturday nights in the summer. Officers have the option of bicycles, patrolling on foot or using borrowed motorcycles to investigate any kind of funny business. The chief also encouraged residents who live near the park to report to the police activity there after dark, when the park is officially closed.

"We have a response roll," explained Ciotola. He's in charge of eight engine companies who respond aggressively to incidents. The fire personnel under his command do hazard assessments, and check areas throughout the season to ensure vegetation is not overgrown, especially on trails, so their equipment can get through. He characterized the two incidents last year as "not much" and shared that this kind of thing happens on a daily basis in other communities.

Bottom line: the cops will be on the lookout for teens looking to party after dark in the Community Park. Residents should call the dispatch line at (925) 284-5010 or email a note to the tip line 94549Tip@gmail.com or call 911 to report suspicious activity. Advice from the battalion chief: if you smell smoke, call 911, and they will send a unit to check it out.

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