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Sports Facilities Subcommittee Considers Options

By Sophie Braccini

The Ad Hoc Facilities Planning Subcommittee met in early May to examine facts and start formulating recommendations to improve the availability of sports facilities in town. Parks and Recreation director Jay Ingram had a pro-bono consultant present cost estimates for improving fields and building new facilities. He then asked the subcommittee members to "dream big" about where they would choose to make a difference if they had \$13 million to spend on sports fields and facilities.

The subcommittee, comprised of representatives from the schools, the town and local sports groups, generally agreed that Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School has the best potential for a new sports field; the same location was also favored by many members as a good site for a new or expanded gymnasium.

Steve Sutherland, principal at SSA Landscape Architects, offered to estimate costs pro bono for the town. His study looked at renovating sports fields in different locations with both natural and artificial turf options.

According to Sutherland's estimates, the lower field at Campolindo High School could become a full size rugby/lacrosse field at a cost of \$855,116 with natural grass or just over \$2.6 million with synthetic turf. The field at JMIS could be improved to accommodate multiple youth soccer fields as well as a full size soccer field and a touch football field at a cost of close to \$1.6 million for natural grass and over \$6 million for synthetic turf. The field at Rheem Elementary School was also studied for a full size rugby field, costing \$640,000 for grass and well over \$1.8 million with synthetic turf. Sutherland highlighted maintenance costs, which he said would be millions of dollars over a 10-year period.

Sutherland was also asked to look at where a 22,000 square foot recreation center could be built in Moraga. He considered the pear orchard next to JMIS and the back acreage at the Moraga Commons Park and found both locations too small. Jill Keimach, town manager, said there could be many different options but that the subcommittee's focus is on sports-only facilities and where to construct additional gyms.

Two options for indoor courts were studied - expanding the current gym at JMIS or building a multi-use sport facility, essentially a tent installed on a concrete foundation, which would accommodate two or three full size indoor basketball/volleyball courts. The cost estimate for doubling the size of the current gym was presented at roughly \$5.5 million and the multi-use facility at less than \$2.9 million.

When subcommittee members were asked to dream about what they wanted for their constituencies in terms of recreational fields and facilities, Campolindo principal John Walker advocated for the renovation of the field at the high school and suggested that the school's small gym could be expanded to accommodate more indoor practices. Councilmember Dave Trotter said his choice would be the construction of a community gym with at least two full size basketball courts. Chris Maher, of the Moraga Sports Alliance, proposed to have a large gym built on the blacktop at JMIS where outdoor basketball is played now; he suggested that music and other activities be moved to the existing gym and the small building that currently houses the music room become a parking area. This idea gained quite a bit of traction among the subcommittee members. Councilmember Mike Metcalf was the only one to mention the need for a multi-generation community center that he said could be built in the pear orchard next to JMIS.

Ingram cautioned that the dreaming session was preliminary and that the next meeting will allow the subcommittee to refine its vision and come up with a plan. Funds for the improvement of sports facilities in town would come from developer fees related to the Palos Colorados project.

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