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Moraga Rotary Plans All-abilities Playground

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga Rotary would like to build Lamorinda's first all-access playground. Image provided

As Moraga Rotary nears its 50th anniversary, it wants to make a legacy contribution to the Town of Moraga. The \$250,000 project that seems to have great momentum is the construction of a playground for kids of all abilities to play side-by-side, the first of its kind in Lamorinda.

But even if the project gets unanimous accolades, its possible location raises again an issue that created years of struggle in town: the dog park and shared use of the Rancho Laguna Park.

Rotary President Kevin Reneau recently presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission the refined concept of the playground the Moraga group has worked on for months already. It would be located at Rancho Laguna Park, completely fenced, with play structures for kids with no disabilities, kids in wheel chairs or having some movement issues, and autistic children.

"It would be a playground where all kids can play side by side," said an enthusiastic Reneau, stressing the fact that it would not ostracize children with disabilities since the structures would be fun for all.

The 30-member group had not planned for such a high bill when they started brainstorming the project. But reality quickly settled in: just to make the ground surface safe for all abilities will cost \$75,000 to \$85,000.

"There will be 24 different elements including platforms and sunshades," said Renault, who also detailed musical elements and a quiet dome for kids who might get overstimulated.

For designing such a far-reaching and complex ensemble, the Rotarians met with numerous professionals, from the school district, Benioff Children Hospital in Oakland and groups specializing in children with special needs. "We anticipate wide community support," said Renault.

The keen mood of the evening was somewhat dampened, though, by comments from the public. "It would be a shame that all that momentum built for this all-access park (be in conflict with) some people start(ing to) advocate that dogs there, especially in the morning, are incompatible with the all-access users," said Seth Freeman.

Barry Behr and Jeanne Moreau, who were also at the forefront of the fight to keep the off-leash dog hours at Rancho Laguna Park, explained that to be all inclusive it would make more sense to locate the new structures at the Moraga Commons park, a more visible and central location, close to public transportation.

Parks and Recreation Commissioner Bill Carman agreed with them but added that there might not be a lot a flat surface currently available at the Commons. However the new park could in fact replace existing structures and be better integrated with other uses of the park, such as the band

shell and the new ADA path recently added to give better access to the Common's concerts to people in wheelchair.

Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram responded that the Rotarians had studied all possible locations, including schools, and that the space at Rancho Laguna park, even if located at the end of the town, was the best possibility. Reneau added that his group was not willing to wait months for a lengthy planning process and that if the town would not support their offer they would put their money and energy somewhere else.

The Moraga Rotary will seek the town council's endorsement on Wednesday, July 13. Ingram added that it was only reasonable for them to ask for that support before they embark in a major fundraising effort. The meeting will take place at 335 Rheem Blvd. It can be followed online live at livestream.com/moraga.

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