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Parks Commission Recommends Commons for All Access Park That Rotary Will Gift to the Town

By Sophie Braccini

Many different locations have been considered since the the Moraga Rotary offered to gift the town of Moraga with an all-access playground. Last month, the town council asked the parks and recreation department to study placing the playground at the Moraga Commons Park.

Now, the parks and recreation commissioners have recommended locating the structure close to the tot lot at the Commons. The town council is expected to make the final decision Aug. 24 so the Rotary can start its fundraising campaign and gift the town with this feature for kids of all abilities. The Moraga Rotary wants to mark its 50th anniversary with giving to the town a playground for all children, including those who have various disabilities. The idea is that all children should have the opportunity to play together and experience this carefree time. The park proposed by the Rotary has been designed to appeal and be adapted to all, whether or not they suffer a disability.

The first location proposed was at Rancho Laguna Park where flat space is available. But the town council decided on July 13 that since the mission of the new play structure is inclusion, the new equipment should be located in a central part of town where all kids go. Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram was tasked with gathering information to determine the possibilities at the Commons and evaluate how much it would cost to nestle the new 5,500-square-foot of play equipment among the existing two playgrounds.

At the July 13 meeting, the council members had unanimously supported the idea that developers' fees that the town has collected could be used by the town to support the additional work that would be needed to locate the all-access equipment at the Commons. The council members had been given an estimate in the \$100,000 range.

Ingram met with Rotarians, engineers and architects to find possibilities. On Aug. 16 he presented commissioners with six options, four at the Commons and two at Rancho Laguna Park. The two locations at Rancho Laguna Park were on the north side, an option that did not carry any extra cost, and the south side of that park that would cost an extra \$132,300 for reconfiguration of the asphalt path.

The four options at the Commons suggested locating the new equipment either close to the upper or lower playground. The first option proposed to use the space adjacent to the upper playground where swing sets are located, with an estimated cost of \$370,500. The second option would have wrapped the new area around the lower playground and toward the picnic tables; it would require tree removals and would cost \$154,400. The third option would place the new park also near the tot-lot, but separate and closer to the Matt Biondi fountain and the Veterans Memorial rock; this option would require also tree removal and cost \$132,900. Since that option uses a more flat area and less grading it is the one recommended by the engineers who were consulted. The fourth option proposed to relocate the lower tot playground to the location of the second option and replace it with the all access site; its cost was estimated at \$385,300.

Besides one parks and recreation commissioner who said he was concerned with overcrowding the Commons, all commissioners agreed to drop the idea of locating the new playground in Rancho Laguna Park. Commissioner Bill Carman advocated for option two because he felt it was more inclusive and integrated all children, but the majority made the decision to recommend the third option to the council.

The Rotarians present at the meeting indicated that they favored a central position for the park at the Commons, but that they could live with whatever decision the council would make. They are looking forward to the final determination of a location so they can start a fundraising effort of large proportion.

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