

Staff Report
City of Sebastopol
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting of July 13, 2010

Item No.: 7C
File No.: 21-23
Date: June 14, 2010
Staff: Kenyon Webster, Planning Director
Jocelyn Immacolato, Associate Planner

Summary

Property Owner: City of Sebastopol

Location: 7400 Willow Street **APN:** 004-201-023

Subject: Ives Park Tour, Deliberation, and Action

CEQA Status: No CEQA determination at this time

General Plan: Parks **Zoning:** CF: Community Facilities

Recommendation: Provide Recommendation to City Council on any short-term improvements to Ives Park

Background:

Per City Council direction, on May 25th, the Planning Commission conducted a Community Forum and Public Hearing as an initial step in evaluating Ives Park issues. The Planning Commission's discussion of the park was then continued to the meeting of June 8th. At the meeting of the 8th, the Planning Commission began its discussion of Ives Park. The Commissioners discussed a variety of topics related to the park, including redesigning the creek to make it more natural looking and accessible to the public, the Veteran's Hall and its relation to the park, park maintenance, park safety, and funding for parks and park projects. The primary focus of the discussion was to determine whether or not a Master Plan should be initiated for the park and to forward the Commission's recommendations regarding this issue to the City Council.

Meeting Summary:

The Planning Commission began its discussion of the park by clarifying with staff where the funds for the creation of a potential Park Master Plan would come from, and if there were additional funds available for a potential Plan and/or to make minor improvements to the park. Staff informed the Commission that the City Council had allocated \$20,000 for Ives Park. A Commissioner noted that in the CDA budget there was a line item for the 'Use of City Property' project in the amount of \$20,000. He asked staff if the Commission could request that these funds be combined with the Ives Park allocation to increase the Ives Park budget. The Planning Director informed the Commission that it could request that the funds be combined, although he was not sure what the CDA's intention was for the funds, as staff had not received direction to move forward on the project.

A Commissioner also asked where funding would come from to implement a Master Plan, if one were created for the park. Staff replied that some funds may come from the Park Impact Fee account, while other funds may come from the CDA budget. He further stated that with an adopted plan, staff would be able to apply for grant

funding, such as State grants and Open Space grants; however park renovation plans are often less competitive than new park projects in terms of grant funding.

Following a brief general discussion about the park, the Commissioners proceeded to provide their feedback regarding the best course of action for improving the park moving forward. Several Commissioners stated that the park appeared piece-meal, as if it were originally constructed without a plan. Other Commissioners stated that the creek bisects the park and is need of a redesign. The Commissioners further discussed several aspects of the park that made it feel unwelcoming, such as the substantial landscaping around its perimeter, the unattractive fencing throughout the park, the dumpsters stationed in the middle of the park, and the billboards attached to the Little League perimeter fence.

The majority of the Commission agreed that the scale of improvements necessary at the park warranted the creation of a Park Master Plan. Several Commissioners stated that many of the park features needed to be significantly renovated, such as the creek, and that the work should be done following a community process and careful consideration. A couple Commissioners noted that since funds to implement a Plan were not likely to be available in the near future, there was no reason to not opt for the Master Plan process. There was also concern that if a Plan were not created, the park would continue to be developed in a piece-meal fashion, which could further degrade the park's ambiance.

One idea discussed by the Commission was to incorporate additional area near the park into the Master Plan. Some Commissioners liked the idea of expanding the study area east to Main Street, encompassing the public parking lot across from the Veteran's Hall. One Commissioner stated that in doing so, a connection between the downtown and Ives Park could be created. Another Commissioner stated that the intersection of Willow Street and Jewell Avenue should also be included in the Master Plan, as he did not think it was well designed at the present time.

At the conclusion of their discussion, the Commissioners agreed that while the creation of a Master Plan was the proper course of action moving forward to address Ives Park improvements, the park would benefit greatly by making some small improvements, preferably in the near future. The Commission agreed that with a small budget, several minor improvements could be done at the park, potentially with the help of Public Works staff. Such improvements to be considered, as mentioned by the Commission, potentially include relocating the dumpsters, pruning some of the perimeter foliage, and removing some of the fencing throughout the park.

Prior to forwarding its recommendation to the City Council, the Commission agreed that a tour of the park would help them identify the most practical improvements to recommend a "phase one" in improving the park. The Commission proceeded to direct staff to schedule the tour of the park prior to the July 13th Planning Commission meeting. The park tour has been scheduled by staff to commence at 5:30 at the Jewell Avenue park entrance.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission attend the Ives Park tour and reconvene to formulate a recommendation to the City Council regarding near-term Ives Park improvements. The Commission should be specific in its recommendation by including the improvements the Commission wishes to see. Staff recommends that such improvements be limited in scope, low-cost, and not requiring design or engineering services.

