

Memo



TO: CRPD Advisory Board

FROM: Jack Harrison, District Administrator

DATE: March 17, 2011

SUBJECT: Schweitzer Grove Nature Area Management

BACKGROUND

Schweitzer Grove Nature Area (SGNA) was acquired in 1971 for the purpose of saving open space. The 17.2 acre site was officially named "Schweitzer Grove Nature Area" in 1984. Over the years, residents in the vicinity of the SGNA have questioned the appropriateness of a disc golf course within a nature area. Disc golfers have testified to the history and value of the course.

At the November 15, 2010 Advisory Board meeting staff offered to conduct a study and return to the 3/17/2011 Advisory Board meeting with a recommendation.

During a public meeting on January 26, at Schweitzer Elementary School neighbors expressed concerns regarding activity at and around the SGNA. Disc golf players reported on their efforts to address neighbors concerns.

Neighbor concerns included;

- The nuisance of street parking
- Alcohol and drug use at the nature area
- Lack of security within the nature area
- Lack of protection for wildlife and plants within the nature area
- Potential development of a parking lot within the park
- Conflicts between disc golfers and other nature area users

FINDINGS

Street Parking

District staff inquired about the feasibility of permit only parking on nearby residential streets. The County Department of Transportation has the authority to designate on-street parking by permit only and parking restrictions. They will only consider such if requested by residents.

Alcohol/Drug use

Although signs are posted at all entrances of the site prohibiting alcohol use, a review of the trash cans at the site verify the constant use of alcohol.

Security

Due to budget constraints the District was forced to abandon its ranger program. Continued use for disc golf would require improved security.

Inventory of Area Disc Courses

- City of Rocklin – located in a large regional park that also features group picnic area, skate park, tennis courts, and library – 18 basket holes, launch pads, benches
- Orangevale Recreation and Park District – located in a community park with parking lot, tennis courts, horse trails, and natural area with walking trails – 18 basket holes, launch pads, benches, and clubhouse
- Smaller/shorter courses are located in Fulton El Camino Recreation and Park District, Cosumnes Community Services District and the City of Sacramento

PURPOSE OF NATURE AREAS

The 2008 District Master Plan provided clarification for the differences between neighborhood parks, community parks and nature areas,

Neighborhood Parks

“Neighborhood parks are designed primarily for unsupervised, non-organized recreation. Located within walking and bicycling distance of most users, these parks are generally three to ten acres in size and serve resident within a half-mile radius.”

Community Parks

“Community parks are planned to provide opportunities for both structured, active and passive, recreation. Community parks generally include facilities that attract people from the entire community, such as pools, lighted fields, and recreation centers, and require support facilities, such as parking and restrooms. These parks may also include significant natural areas and trails. The optimal size of community parks is a minimum of 20 acres.”

Natural Areas

“Natural areas are permanent, undeveloped green spaces which are managed for both their natural value as well as for recreational use. Natural areas can range in size from one to more than 1,000 acres, and may include wetlands, wildlife habitats, or stream corridors. Natural areas provide opportunities for nature-based recreation, such as bird-watching and environmental education. These parks may preserve or protect environmentally sensitive areas, such as unique and/or endangered plant species.”

The Master Plan states “Schweitzer Grove Nature Area is a 17.2 acre nature area. A large portion of the site is covered by a eucalyptus grove. There is also an area with an oak restoration project underway. The setting and mature trees make it ideal for passive uses and nature areas.”

In December 2009 the District Advisory Board approved the following definition of open space “Area used for the preservation of plant and animal life and used for low intensity recreation such as, but not limited to; hiking, bird watching, photography.” The advisory board also approved the designation of SGNA as open space.

DISTRICT MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

“Recommendations for maintenance

- Improve drainage in places
- Clear diseased and dead vegetation
- Maintain the native oaks

Recommendations for improvements

- Provide directional signage at San Juan and Sumter Drive. If signage results in excessive parking on Sumter, consider adding a small parking lot somewhere within the Nature Area.
- Add dog walking features (dog drinking fountain and pet waste station)
- Add Signage
- Build soft-surface, multi-use trails for walking, and jogging
- Add benches or boulders for sitting”

CONCLUSIONS

The SGNA was acquired for the purpose of preserving open space. The District Master Plan approved by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors recommends SGNA be used for passive use. Passive use includes such activities as walking, bird watching and photography. Active use includes organized sports, disc golf, model airplanes and other activities that take the visitor off designated trails. Further, the current disc golf course is a community facility and is more appropriate for a community park where onsite parking is available.

Staff has identified and evaluated two alternatives for the consideration of the Advisory Board.

Alternative #1

Find that the current disc golf activities are not consistent with;

- The purpose for which the site was acquired, i.e. preserve open space for passive uses.
- The designation of the Schweitzer Grove as a Nature Area.
- The recommendations in the approved District Master Plan.

Find that disc golf is a valid recreation activity that should, if possible, be accommodated at a community park within the District such as Carmichael Park.

Find that a ranger patrol program may be needed to provide compliance with park rules and County ordinances.

Alternative #2

Find that consideration should be given to revising the District Master Plan to designate the Schweitzer Grove Nature Area as a Community Park. Such a revision to the District Master Plan can only occur following a public participation process, and will require approval of the County Board of Supervisors. If the Nature Area is designated as a community park, a Site Master Plan will be prepared to determine how the park should be developed and operated which may include support facilities such as parking and restrooms.

If this alternative is selected by the Advisory Board the disc golf course and activities should be allowed to continue pending the completion of a Master Site Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends Alternative Number 1. We further recommend that the disc golf activities be allowed to continue until May 1, 2011. Prior to May 1, staff will provide signs regarding Nature Area rules and designated trails. District staff will also arrange for a ranger patrol program on an as needed basis. Finally, staff would like to work with interested parties to determine the feasibility of a disc golf course within Carmichael Park.