
St. John/Coronado Hills Combined Neighborhood Plan
Tuesday, October 20, 2009 – Virginia Brown Recreation Center Room B
Parks and Community Gardens Workshop

Overview: Shelia Balog, facilitator, began with introductions and a review of the ground rules that were developed during the Kick-Off meeting. Minal Bhakta, Associate Planner, provided a neighborhood planning process update and presented the workshop agenda and discussion topic, parks and community gardens. In framing the discussion, Minal introduced the guest speakers and subject matter experts, Ricardo Soliz of Parks and Recreation Department and Sari Albornoz and Jessica Guffey of Sustainable Food Center.

Ricardo Soliz began his presentation by focusing on how PARD is funded and the diverse range of funding PARD utilizes to meet the needs of citizens: bonds (\$84 million), parkland dedication (\$650), general funds, grants, non-profits and others (Austin Parks Foundation).

Question 1: In the example of Bartholomew Park, money from the Austin Clean Water Program that went to PARD, what was done with that money?

Answer (PARD): Targeted for splash pads and spray pads. This [Bartholomew] is an older project so we are more sophisticated now with how the utility money is being used. We have a more formal process in place now.

Question 2: Once you get the money does the community ask for what they want or do you just decide?

Answer (PARD): No, this is all a public process...we have a mitigation plan; the public process includes community meetings. There is a Parks Board, they are very sharp and the mitigation plan carries a lot of weight.

Comment: We spend most of our time on Bond funded projects.

Question 3: Do you have a breakdown of how the money, the \$70 million you referenced, is distributed [throughout the city]?

Answer (PARD): Yes, we can get this information to you.

Question 4: What is your timeframe for the Bartholomew Pool?

Answer (PARD): Bartholomew is funded by two separate bond projects. The first, Bartholomew wading project has been funded. I have been meeting with the neighborhood and the design/build is in progress and should be running by the summer.

Question 5: Why is there no wading pool in St. John anymore?

Answer (PARD): The neighborhood wanted a circulating pool; with the splash pads we do not need lifeguards so we can keep the facility opened longer; this will become a destination in the community.

St. John pool closing and transition is funded; it is in phase 2. I originally spoke with the St. John neighborhood association about putting a splash pad in the current location (St. John Park)

Question 6: So, there will not be a pool replaced?

Answer (PARD): No, it will be a splash pad; the closest pool will be at Bartholomew.

Ricardo Soliz turned the participants' attention to the PARD GAP map, explaining how part of the PARD criteria for creating the map is for no one to have to walk more than 1 mile to get to city parklands. A PARD initiative to help narrow these gaps is through "infill parks."

Question 6: When you put in a new subdivision the builder must pay a fee; do you have to spend the money in that neighborhood?

Answer (PARD): We target about \$1 million for neighborhood parks and in high development areas like downtown, the money goes more towards enhancements within that mile radius.

Ricardo mentioned to the participants that PARD is looking for land available for future park designation/development. He explained that specific criteria exists to measure whether or not a piece of land would be considered "desirable", i.e. that the property has frontage along a well-traveled road, that there are trees on the property, etc.

Question 7: When the city buys land for schools, that land should be used by the community. This is the way it used to be; now Reagan has closed the soccer fields off from the community. There is no place for them to play soccer, and I thought excess lands on school grounds were supposed to be open to the community? What happened? Why don't kids get to play at Reagan anymore?

Answer (PARD): I will have to look into the specific Reagan situation. Some school ground, PARD went into jointly, some we did not. We need to check out the land purchase with the school district. This becomes tough with shared fields.

Question 8: What about the area IH35 to 290?

Answer (PARD): We want to get this into the next bond 2013; 2010 transportation bond money will be used to complete the trail system

Question 9: What do you mean by future?

Answer (PARD): Tomorrow and then forward.

Minal Bhakta, Associate Planner, thanked the PARD staff (Ricardo Soliz and Jodi Jay) for their presentation and introduced the topic of community gardens and the Sustainable Food Center. Presenters, Sari Albornoz and Jessica Guffey of Sustainable Food Center, then began their presentation.

Sari began the presentation by asking the community what types of discussion regarding community gardens has taken place so far?

Participants answer: We've mostly talked about community gardens in these planning meetings; I am not sure what land is still available in Coronado Hills to do community gardens.

Question 1: What is going on at Reagan?

Answer (SFC): Great question, we will go into that in more detail in just a minute.

Question 2: Are librarians conversant in the communities to be able to show folks the website? (This question was asked in reference to a Google map SFC showed during their presentation. The map highlights the location of all existing community gardens in Austin.)

Answer (SFC): That is a great idea, to make sure the librarians are aware of this map and how to read it.

Answer (COA): Paola, of the St. John Library is very supportive of the planning process and has been so helpful; a great resource. We can let her know about the map.

Comment 1: Some of these community gardens you are showing have waiting lists; this is a good sign and good for people who are interested in one to know.

Question 3: What are these limestone beds? Why doesn't anyone look into the soils we have?

Answer (SFC): We are looking into putting in ground beds at Reagan. We use both raised and in-ground beds, it just depends.

Question 4: How much does it take to start; how much do you have to spend? We don't have a lot of sponsorship in this area.

Answer (SFC): It varies, costs are different for raised beds versus in-ground beds; there is assistance (technical) available to help get a garden started.

Question 5: I just don't think this is feasible in terms of resources; it takes time and money and most people in the community have to work.

Answer (SFC): I think it works. These are great points to consider and work out, but there are examples in the city of how this can work. SFC then spent some

time discussing relevant examples, such as the community garden in University Hills/Windsor Park.

The second part of the Parks and Community Gardens workshop focused on a small group exercise consisting of two activities, one parks related and the other focused on community gardens:

- 1) Identify locations for community gardens
- 2) Brainstorm improvements needed to existing and new parks

Neighborhood planning staff facilitated two small groups where participants were encouraged to brainstorm and participate in discussion focused on parks and community gardens.

The following notes capture the thoughts and comments expressed by SJCH participants when asked to brainstorm about locations for community gardens:

The following locations were drawn on a map (see map for more information)

- Area of undeveloped land fronting Cameron Road and adjacent to/just north of Cameron Oaks plaza (Coronado Hills)
- Area of land on the EMS Station property (Coronado Hills)

In addition to this mapping exercise, SFC passed around a sign-up sheet for those interested in learning more about opportunities to get involved with the Reagan community garden. Several signatures were collected.

The following notes capture the thoughts and comments expressed by SJCH participants when asked to brainstorm about locations for existing and future parks:

A list of amenities desired by participants include (top priorities are in emboldened):

- **Walking trails**
- **Play-scapes (a note was made for safe playscapes; Mueller play area was provided as an example/model)**
- **Recreation areas – informal soccer fields, volleyball, etc.)**
- **Covered pavilion**
- Small park
- Trees
- Benches
- Fenced area for off-leash dogs
- Lighting

The following locations were designated on the working maps and the corresponding needs/desires are provided (see map for more detail):

Location	Need/Desire to be met
Buttermilk Park	Lighting at the wooden bridge
	Can this open space be used for informal soccer fields or volleyball
	Swing set
	Splash pad
St. John Park	Potential for recreation and/or trail
	Playscape (fenced in for safety, ex. Mueller play area)
Creek running through Coronado Hills	Parks along the creek
Undeveloped land at the EMS station	Soccer fields or a pocket park
Old Home Depot site/New Muni-court/substation	Possible opportunity to work with the vacant/undeveloped land

Other interesting ideas that came out of the small group discussions relate to programs that potentially could be offered at the Virginia Brown Recreation Center. Specifically, the desire is for the community center to offer courses and workshops designed to build skills and train women in the community on the following topics (however, programs can include a wide variety of participants):

- o Cooking (a suggestion was made for the participants to investigate the option of working with the Sustainable Food Center's "La Cocina Alegre" - cooking classes)
- o Sewing
- o Literacy
- o Writing
- o Beauty

For those thoughts and comments provided by participants that relate most directly to future planning workshop topics, the information was captured and will be brought back during the appropriate topic workshop. For example, when working on the parks and community gardens exercise several concerns were voiced regarding transportation issues. These concerns will be addressed during the transportation workshop.

In addition to the input received at the SJ/CH Parks and Community Gardens workshop, staff collected and gathered information from participants involved in a Friday morning Pickle Parent Coffee (10.16.2009). Approximately 30 parents attended and most were Spanish-speaking. To further address the issue of an overall lack of the Spanish-speakers voice in the planning process, a Coronado Hill resident met with some of the Spanish speakers from the planning area and

gathered information specifically related to the development of the SJ/CH combined neighborhood plan. The following section highlights the concerns, issues and comments collected during both outreach efforts. The questions asked to these groups mirror those asked of the participants that attended the SJ/CH workshop on 10.20.09. As well, the information provided below was printed on a large poster that was displayed at the 10.20 workshop. This gave workshop participants the opportunity to react to the information collected outside of the scheduled workshop.

How are existing parks being utilized? What would you like to see in the existing parks (St. John Park, Virginia Brown Recreation Park)?

St. John Park:

Not all residents know of the St. John park. Proper signage is needed.
There is a need for covered picnic benches or gazebo to provide shelter for parents and kids when using the St. John park and pool.
St. John park pool should have similar opening/closing hours as other city pools.
More trash cans are needed

Virginia Brown Recreation Park:

More security is needed at Virginia Brown park in general (i.e. cameras, lighting)
More lighting is needed on pedestrian bridges over the creek to ensure safety of people walking over it in the evening and early mornings.
More lighting is needed at the back of Virginia Brown
The park is a shared facility; during the day it is used exclusively by Pickle Elementary School students and faculty. Proper signage is needed to make people aware of those hours and usage.
More trash cans are needed
Grass and landscaping needs to be properly maintained (snakes are a prevalent problem)
A protective fence to keep kids from going into the creek to play is needed.
Bathrooms in Virginia Brown Center need proper maintenance

If a new park were to be created in your neighborhood, what would you like to see in the new park?

Covered picnic benches for people to sit under during summer months
Futbol field
Small ball park
Basket-ball court