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December 9, 2003

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
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LIFE ENRICHMENT COMMITTEE  
Oakland, California

Chairperson Chang and Members of the Committee:

Subject: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION  
ADVISORY COMMISSION

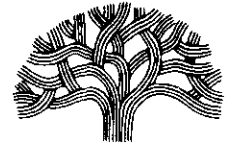
The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission was created by Ordinance No. 8065 C.M.S., adopted November 13, 1969, and amended by Ordinance No. 11731 C.M.S., adopted July 26, 1994. The Commission advises on matters relating to the general policy and operation of the parks and recreation system, and provides an annual report to the City Council. Attached is the Commission's 2003 report.

Respectfully submitted,

DEBORAH A. EDGERLY  
Interim City Manager

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# CITY OF OAKLAND



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Office of Parks and Recreation

December 9, 2003

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Life Enrichment Committee  
Oakland City Council

**Subject: Annual Report of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission**

To Chairperson Chang and Members of the Committee:

This is the annual report of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) to the City Council covering the period from January 2003 to December 2003.

In accordance with the Committee's recommended guidelines, this report addresses the following questions:

1. Who are the Commission's constituency?
2. What is the most urgent problem(s) facing these constituents?
3. What is/are the potential solution(s) for correcting the problem(s)?
4. What are specific recommendations for City Council action?
5. What special circumstances impact those recommendation(s) for action given the severe budget constraints?

1. Constituency: The constituency of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission is very broad - all of Oakland's citizens, visitors, and those who work in Oakland. We are responsive to the families who want to picnic in the parks and whose children enjoy the play structures, the youth who play field sports and recreation programs in centers, the adults who walk along Lake Merritt, the seniors who enjoy daytime recreation programs, the visitors who hike the Oakland hills trails, and the workers who relax in downtown parks at lunchtime.

We are also cognizant of our constituents who do not use the parks and facilities. Numerous potential users do not participate in a particular program because of transportation problems. Others do not use their neighborhood parks due to a lack of interest, lack of ownership, or other problems. PRAC is committed to addressing ways to bring more programs to recreation centers, and making visitors feel more welcome and secure in their parks.

2. Urgent Problems: 1). Cutbacks in maintenance have led to dirty, unsafe and unattractive facilities. 2). Several concessionaires operating public facilities, such as City Stables and Montclair Driving Range, are controversial with the public and generate numerous and repeated complaints. 3). Integrating new parks into an ever-changing department structure with limited resources and sometime unclear accountability. 4). Examining the unintended

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consequences of policies, such as the no pesticide policy, implemented at the same time as cutbacks in gardening staff, which led to major weed and pest problems in many parks. 5). Monitoring how well we serve the public, that the City provides courteous, efficient service, with effective online and in-person reservation and registration systems. 6). Exploring potential private-public collaborations for use of public facilities. 7). Protecting Oakland's trees, especially natives, is a challenge with a decades-old tree preservation ordinance, a dense city, and many new developments in areas with mature trees.

Finally, an urgent problem that confronts PRAC as a commission needs to be addressed. We are an eleven-member body, but as the attendance list demonstrates, have several vacancies, and a number of absences. As reported last year, our effectiveness is blunted when we consistently lack a quorum, and do not have commissioners from the diverse communities of Oakland. Several issues of significant public concern have been brought to the PRAC, but we either did not have a quorum, or the public had to wait until a quorum was achieved, thereby inconveniencing the members of the public, and threatening the effectiveness of PRAC.

3. Solutions: We recognize that there are no easy solutions to many of the problems the PRAC encounters. However, the Commission has worked to address some of the concerns. 1). The priority commitment of PRAC is to ensure effective resources for maintenance programs. Toward this end, PRAC is advocating that the Department remain intact, while responsibility for median strips be shifted to Public Works, and that staff be increased to accommodate better maintenance. In addition, PRAC supports the efforts of Oakland Parks Coalition (OPC) to advocate for better maintenance and to develop a sense of public ownership of parks by supporting a park stewardship program. 2). PRAC has recommended to Council that the City Stables contract be put to bid to explore alternative concessionaires. In addition, PRAC has recommended that the concessionaire of the Montclair Golf Course be ordered to comply with the terms of its Concession Agreement. 3). PRAC believes that an intact OPR would be most responsive and accountable to the public, and seek to improve the accountability of staff to the needs of residents and visitors. 4). PRAC held hearings regarding the City's IPM policy, and, after much public input, concluded that the present ordinance is lacking. We have recommended that Council re-examine the ordinance, specifically to fill the vacant position of IPM compliance officer, which is mandated under the ordinance, and, further, to explore limited use of herbicide spraying. 5). PRAC has favorably reviewed the survey results of the Rec-Ware program, and expect the program to further improve the level of service. In addition, the Commission has performed community outreach by holding meetings in the community and encouraged greater public participation. 6). PRAC has held hearings on the potential use of public-private collaborations, such as Camps In Common's operation of the Feather River Camp, and the operation of the Jack London Aquatic Center. 7). Finally, PRAC takes its role of hearing tree appeals seriously, as it gives appellants and opponents sufficient input before making deliberative decisions. We intend to re-examine the Protected Tree Ordinance, and consider further recommendations regarding possible changes to the ordinance.

As to the problem of vacancies, we believe that City Council can play a role in alleviating the problem. While appointments are made by the Mayor, we encourage Council members to identify and recruit appropriate community activists within their respective districts, and submit

such candidates to the Mayor. The PRAC serves as an ideal conduit for public participation in local government, and it can fully flourish if the Administration and City Council collectively agree to make it work.

4. Specific recommendations: The first challenge is to work within the City's budget constraints to consider the reallocation of resources to park maintenance and key programs, and to review required supervision staffing. PRAC recommends a proposal to revise the City's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy, which lacks a dedicated staff person, and is far from integrated. We also recommend that alternatives to controversial concessionaires be explored. Finally, PRAC will consider recommendations to revise and update the Protected Tree Ordinance.

5. Budget constraint impacts: PRAC recognizes and appreciates the current budget constraints, and understands the need to examine how staff are deployed, especially in comparison to other cities of similar size and with similar programs, and national standards for staffing functions compared to Oakland experience. We also focus on expanding successful programs, and consider revising/reviewing less successful ones. The Commissioners believe that much improvement can be had without significant increase to the budget.

We also must recognize that a budget increase may be necessary. PRAC believes that the Department has been understaffed and under-funded for several years, and the problems are mounting. We believe that safe, welcoming parks in all of our neighborhoods is a significant quality of life issue, and it will take additional resources to improve the system.

Respectfully submitted



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Matthew J. Webb, Chair  
Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

**PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION  
ATTENDANCE REPORT  
May 2002 – October 2003**

	ABAD	FISCHBACH -BENSON	HAHN APPT. 3/17/03	JUAREZ APPT. 1/13/02	MAGID APPT. 1/13/02	MYERS	NELSON	PATTERSON	TONG APPT. 1/13/02	WEBB
5/8/02	P	P				P	P	A		P
6/12/02	P	P				A	P	P		P
7/10/02	P	P				P	P	P		A
August – Recess										
9/11/02	P	P				A	P	P		P
10/9/02 *	A	P				P	P	P		P
11/13/02	P	A		P	P	A	P	P	P	P
12/11/02	A	P		A	A	P	P	P	P	P
1/8/03	P	P		P	A	A	P	P	P	P
2/26/03	P	P		A	P	A	P	A	P	P
3/12/03	A	A		P	A	A	P	P	P	P
4/9/03	P	P		A	A	A	P	P	A	P
5/14/03	P	P		P	P	A	P	P	P	P
6/11/03 *	P	A	A	A	A	A	P	P	A	P
7/9/03	A	P	P	P	P	A	P	A	A	P
August - Recess										
9/10/03	P	P	A	A	P	A	A	P	P	P
10/8/03	P	P	A	P	A	A	P	P	P	P
present / total mtgs	12/16	13/16	1/4	6/11	5/11	4/16	15/16	13/16	8/11	15/16

Note: Meetings are every second Wednesday. No meeting in August.

Key:

- P present
- A absent, including excused absences
- D meeting deferred
- \* no quorum

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