



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Sabrina B. Landreth
City Administrator

FROM: J. Nicholas Williams
Director, Parks &
Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Report from the Parks and Recreation
Advisory Commission

DATE: April 3, 2017

City Administrator Approval

Date:

5/10/17

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report From The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This informational report from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) contains an update on PRAC activities during the 2015 – 2016 calendar years.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Accept an informational report from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Dana Riley, Assistant to the Director, at 510-238-6495.

Respectfully submitted,



J. Nicholas Williams
Director, Parks & Recreation Department

Prepared by:
Dana Riley, Assistant to the Director
Parks & Recreation, Administration

Attachments (1): A - Report from the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission

Item: _____
Life Enrichment Comte
May 23, 2017

**BIENNIAL (2015-2016) REPORT TO THE OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL
FROM THE OAKLAND PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

BARRY MILLER, IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

February 22, 2017

Introduction

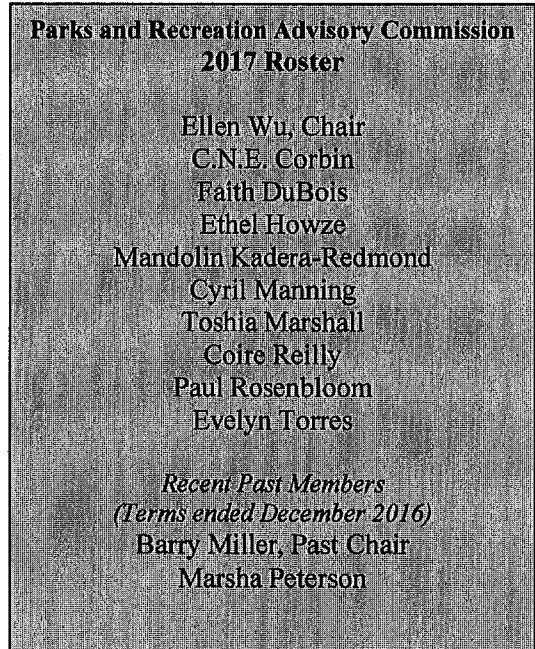
For nearly five decades, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) has advised the City Council on the management of parks and delivery of recreational services in Oakland. PRAC's enabling legislation requires that the Commission provide periodic status reports to the City Council. As immediate past Chair of the Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC), I am pleased to submit this report on PRAC's activities during calendar years 2015 and 2016.

PRAC is an 11-member Commission. There are currently 10 members, with one vacant seat expected to be filled soon. The Commission includes one member appointed in 2010, four members appointed in 2012, two members appointed in 2015, and three members appointed in 2016. PRAC meetings take place on the second Wednesday of each month at 4:30 PM at the Marsha J. Corprew Garden Center in Lakeside Park. PRAC's monthly agenda covers a broad range of business items, including the permitting of special events in parks, collection of funds on-site for such events, permitting of capital improvements and new facilities, tree removal permit appeals, and commemorative naming of benches and other park facilities. PRAC meetings also provide an opportunity for Commissioners and the public to discuss important policy issues relating to parks and recreation in Oakland.

Park Improvements Considered by PRAC

One of PRAC's most important functions is to review and evaluate proposed improvements to Oakland's parks. PRAC makes recommendations to the Oakland Planning Department on major and minor conditional use permits for a variety of facilities, and its hearings are the principal opportunity for public comment on these facilities.

Between January 2015 and December 2016, the Commission convened hearings on new skate parks at DeFremery and Montclair Parks, the renovation of Bishop Floyd Begin Plaza and St. Andrews Plaza, landscape improvements at Lincoln Square and Gateway Gardens, and the renovation and expansion of Rainbow Recreation Center. PRAC also conducted hearings and offered guidance on



new murals at Durant Park, Verdese Carter Park, and the Charles Porter Golden Gate Recreation Center, the installation of public art near the Sailboat House at Lake Merritt, creation of a wetland in Joaquin Miller Park, and the installation of mountain lion tracking cameras at parks in the Oakland Hills. PRAC also provided guidance on the installation of trail markers in Dimond Canyon and Montclair Railroad Park, and developed mitigation measures for increasing the height of a cell phone tower in Columbian Gardens Park. Several projects approved by PRAC are now under construction, including the extension of Snow Park (Lake Merritt Green Street) and expansion of the Oakland Zoo.

Collection of Funds

Much of PRAC's regular agenda involves reviewing requests from organizations to sell goods or collect money in Oakland parks. These activities, which include concerts and performances, fundraising events by non-profits, community gatherings, and local festivals and cultural events, require PRAC approval under the Oakland Municipal Code. The funds collected at park events typically cover donations, entry fees, food and beverage concessions, and local vendor sales.

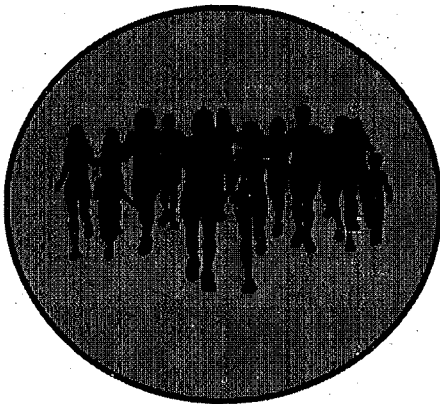
In 2015-2016, PRAC considered requests for **100** separate special events. These events included 36 fundraising walks or runs around Lake Merritt. Each walk/ run generated charitable donations to promote health, fitness, education, the arts, and the well-being of Oakland children and families.

PRAC also conducted hearings and provided permits for 64 events in parks, including concerts, festivals, social justice gatherings, flea markets, makers' fairs, fashion shows, book fairs, and PTA fundraisers, among others. This included popular events attracting thousands of people, such as the Oakland Running Festival, the Carmen Flores Day of Music, DeFremery Park's Black Cowboy Association Annual Parade and Life is Living Festival, the Autumn Lights Festival, Mosswood Park's Black-eyed Pea Festival, Pan-African Family Reunion, and Burger Boogaloo Concert, Lowell Park's Umoja Festival, and San Antonio Park's Malcolm X Jazz Festival.

The range of special event requests in Oakland's parks continues to expand. Among the notable new events approved by the Commission in 2015-2016 were a "silent disco" in Lakeside Park, an attempt to break the Guinness Book of Records for the longest soul train line (in DeFremery Park), a Belgian Beer and Film festival at Mosswood Park, the Cool Water Memorial Day celebration at the Jack London Aquatic Center, and Abaddon Oakland, a live-action gaming app that drew more than 2,000 participants to Lake Merritt. PRAC also approved permits for Dragon Boat Races on Lake Merritt that were projected to draw more than 4,000 spectators to Oakland.

As in years past, Lake Merritt has been the site of most of the special events coming to PRAC. Mosswood, DeFremery, and San Antonio Parks also experience very high levels of demand. The PRAC hearing process provides an important forum for discussing event-related issues such as public safety, restrooms, and traffic. PRAC does not simply "rubber stamp" events—the Commission spends time with each applicant at its hearings to avoid potential conflicts, mitigate concerns, ensure good park stewardship, and create success for event organizers, participants, and the City of Oakland.

activities approved by PRAC in 2015-2016



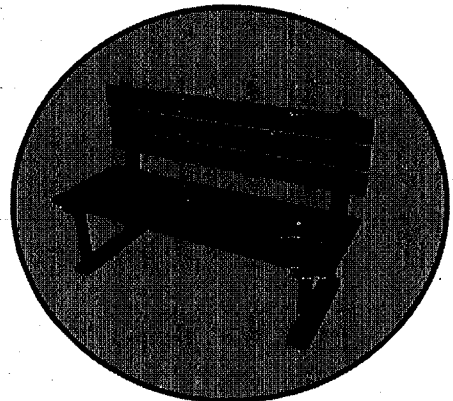
36

**Fundraising walks
around Lake Merritt**



64

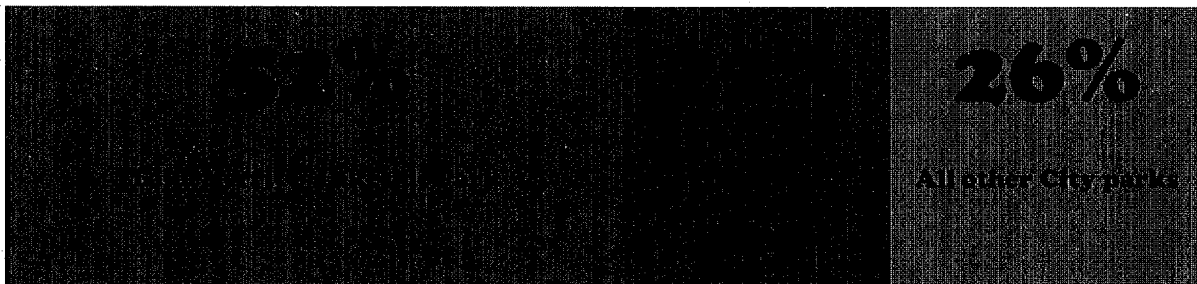
**Special events in
parks or rec centers**



20

**Commemorative
naming of benches or
other park features**

location of activities approved by PRAC in 2015-2016



Review of Plans and Programs

In 2015 and 2016, PRAC participated in the planning processes for Brooklyn Basin, Coliseum City, and Downtown Oakland. Following presentations to the Commission by the Planning Department on each plan, the Commission provided constructive feedback to ensure that parks and recreation were being adequately addressed.

In early 2015, the Commission provided critical feedback on the lack of sufficient parkland in the Coliseum City Plan, and recommended that a larger and more functional network of active open spaces be included. In Fall, 2015, PRAC convened public hearings on the proposed Brooklyn Basin park system. The Commission suggested specific changes to the park's initial design, leading to major revisions and a more equitable, sustainable, and creative concept plan. PRAC worked collaboratively with the Oakland Planning Commission to ensure that this new waterfront park system will consist of quality public space serving all Oaklanders.

Commissioners also participated in the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan process, urging the Planning Department to designate new open spaces in Downtown Oakland in proportion to the amount of development planned for the area. The Commission weighed in on such issues as the potential for a I-980 freeway "lid park," and opportunities for greener streets, roof gardens, more art, new plazas, and eco-friendly landscapes in Downtown Oakland.

Liaisons to the Community

Each PRAC Commissioner serves an ambassador to the community. Commissioners are assigned the role of liaison to recreation centers across the city. Commissioners meet with Recreation Center Directors, Recreation Advisory Councils, and "Friends" organizations to listen, advocate, and report back to PRAC on outstanding issues. Our Commissioners also serve as liaisons to the Oakland Zoo, Dunsmuir House and Gardens, Oakland Unified School District, the Rotary Nature Center, sports and athletics interest groups, boating and aquatics groups, and local community gardens. During the past two years, PRAC has also forged stronger ties with the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, working collaboratively to advocate for parks funding and maintenance.

PRAC Commissioners also advocate for parks and recreation at special events and meetings, both at the neighborhood level and the citywide level. Individual commissioners have participated in meetings relating to public safety, budgeting, development, equity, and other topics to ensure that parks have a seat at the table, and that the unmet needs of Oakland parks are not forgotten. Commissioners assist City staff in marketing, social media, meeting facilitation, and direct communication with constituents and user groups. Two Commissioners served on the selection committee for the new Parks and Recreation Director, and several commissioners have served on citywide task forces.

Tree Appeals

The Oakland Municipal Code designates PRAC as the appeal body for non-development related tree removal permits and City-owned tree removal permits. The property owner or adjacent property owner may appeal staff's decision to allow or deny a tree removal permit application. In such instances, PRAC weighs staff's recommendation against the case made by the appellant. Two tree appeals were heard in 2015 and 2016, including a highly controversial application on Vernon Street that generated more than two hours of public comment, and a second application on Longridge Road. PRAC approved the appeal (and overturned staff's decision) in the first case and denied the appeal (and upheld staff's decision) in the other.

The Commission has also engaged in a dialogue with various organizations working to "re-forest" Oakland and plant trees throughout the City. We believe it is important that this dialogue continues, and that the value of trees and Oakland's urban forest is more broadly recognized. In this spirit, we believe the Council should consider creating a separate hearing body for tree appeals comprised of arborists and landscape professionals.

Commemorative Naming and Naming Rights

PRAC is charged with considering requests for the commemorative naming of benches, recreational facilities, and other park features. In 2015-2016, the Commission approved commemorative naming of 13 benches and the installation of several commemorative plaques. We also approved the renaming of an oak grove at DeFremery Park for Bobby Hutton, whose death in 1968 was a milestone in Black Panther history. The Commission also approved the commemorative naming of Golden Gate Recreation Center for Charles Porter, and the naming of the gym at Rainbow Recreation Center for Jason Richardson, following a gift in kind to renovate the gym by the Golden State Warriors.

PRAC's role has focused on commemorative naming rather than the use of naming rights to generate revenue for capital improvements. The Commission began to discuss naming rights as a revenue source in 2015, working in collaboration with Staff and the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation. PRAC members recognize the importance of having clear guidelines for raising money through sponsorships, gifts in kind, and the sale of naming rights. At the same time, the Commission is sensitive to public perceptions that parks and recreational facilities are not "for sale" to the highest bidder. Looking forward, PRAC is prepared to be a sounding board for future naming rights policies and proposals. PRAC can serve as a hearing body as new guidelines are vetted before being forwarded to the City Council.

Policy Issues

During the last two years, PRAC has increased its role as a policy advisory body, assisting City staff and the Council on several key issues. This section of our annual report highlights four of those issues.

Grilling. In late 2014, the newly restored east shore of Lake Merritt became Oakland's go-to spot for weekend barbecues. While the phenomenon was largely positive, it adversely affected the lawn areas, new landscaping, traffic circulation, and the Lake itself. PRAC formed a Grilling subcommittee to listen to the community and develop new rules and regulations for barbecue activities. An important outcome was the installation of permanent grills at several locations in Lakeside Park, where more space is available for park users and coals and trash may be safely disposed.

Park Rules and the Regulation of Sound. The grilling discussions highlighted other aspects of the Oakland Municipal Code (OMC) relating to parks that were obsolete and needed revision. Working with OPR staff, a PRAC subcommittee began meeting regularly to rewrite various sections of the OMC relating to such topics as bicycles in parks and limits on amplified sound. PRAC convened a public hearing on proposed changes to the OMC in September 2016, and its Park Rules Subcommittee convened a follow-up hearing in November. More than 35 people spoke at each hearing. Much of the focus was on drumming at Lake Merritt—the conversation was emblematic of broader community stress about displacement, gentrification, and the loss of Oakland's cultural heritage. PRAC is still working with the community to achieve a balance between the right to cultural expression and the desire of neighbors for quiet. Our public hearings have been notable for the respectful and civil quality of the dialogue. We are listening to all perspectives and are committed to achieving workable outcomes.

Development Impact Fees. In 2016, PRAC was represented on the Task Force convened to advise the City Administrator and Council on Development Impact Fees. Our Commission advocated strongly for park impact fees, noting that Oakland is one of the only cities in the Bay Area that does not collect such fees. The lack of fees is even more troubling when the City's growth forecasts are considered. Investment in Oakland's parks is not keeping pace with the City's growth. Although PRAC passed a Resolution urging the Council to create substantial impact fees for parks, only a small amount of the current fees are earmarked for that purpose. The Commission will continue to lobby for park funding and hopes to be involved in the oversight process as Measure KK funds are committed to future projects.

Equity. PRAC frequently engages in discussions of social equity, particularly with respect to its review of new specific plans, capital projects, and public safety. The Commission strives for greater investment in parks serving low income communities and communities of color, and seeks to improve access to recreational services across the city. Oakland's parks play a critical role in youth development and public safety. At the same time, parts of the city are critically deficient in park acreage and recreational facilities. While Commissioners are generally supportive of programs to improve park security (through measures such as gates and volunteer patrols), such changes must not be exclusionary or make parks feel less welcoming. PRAC also seeks humane approaches to addressing homelessness in parks, an issue of growing concern to all of us.

Looking Toward the Future

As Parks and Recreation Commissioners, we see firsthand that parks make life better in Oakland. At each Commission hearing, our parks are described as places of refuge, joy, peace, and celebration. When the Golden State Warriors were victorious, Oakland celebrated at Lake Merritt Park. When Oaklanders sought solace after the November election, they joined hands around the Lake. When Mosswood Recreation Center burned down, nearly 200 people came together in a torrential rainstorm to commit to its rebuilding. Oaklanders love their parks.

As Parks and Recreation Commissioners, we embrace our role as park advocates and champions. We will continue to push for increased funding, more robust partnerships, and greater awareness of the value of parks and recreation in our city. We recognize that Oakland faces many urgent priorities. But too often we have seen park needs pushed down the priority list as funds are steered toward other critical needs such as housing and transportation. Investing in our community means investing in the common grounds that connect our neighborhoods and bring us together. More funding is needed for park maintenance, recreation center staff, sports facilities and recreational centers, park safety, land acquisition, recreation programming, and strategic planning.

There is much to be done. PRAC stands ready to assist the Mayor and City Council as Oakland faces new opportunities and challenges in the coming year.



Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, August 2016(*)

() Includes Commissioners Miller and Peterson (termed out, December 2016). Not pictured: Commissioner Torres (joined Dec 2016)*