

## Nonprofit group seeks to lease, develop Westside Park

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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LAKEPORT &ndash; Westside Community Park Inc. is interested in leasing its namesake park from the city in order to move forward with the next phase in the park's development, and the City Council has agreed to enter negotiations on the plan. The Lakeport City Council discussed the park lease proposal at its Tuesday meeting.

City Attorney Steve Brookes presented the issue to the council. He explained that the proposed lease agreement with Westside Community Park Inc. would allow the group to develop the park through the use of volunteer help and private funds, and on their own timeline.

While that could be a plus for the city, which has reported it's short on funds, it also would mean a loss of control of the land, said Brookes. If the quality of improvements aren't up to the public's expectations, that also could be a problem for the city.

Group Chair Ron Raetz said the group wants to move forward with the park's second construction phase.

"The park's 11 years old now," said Raetz.

Two years into the park's construction, Raetz said the city began "digging in its feet" due to concerns over some of the committee's work on the park, although he didn't specify the exact issues.

For the last seven years, the groups has been preparing for construction of phase two, said Raetz. "We'll do whatever it takes so we can finish this park."

Raetz said the committee just cleared more than \$25,000 in a fundraiser. "So we're ready to go."

He said he hadn't yet seen a copy of the agreement, which Brookes said was because he was waiting for the council's approval before offering the draft agreement to Raetz.

Brookes said the draft lease agreement includes a stipulation requiring the group to take over the park's daily maintenance.

Councilman Ron Bertsch suggested making the lease term for three years rather than one, since it's hard to make progress in a year and a shorter duration could cause difficulties when seeking grants.

Various lease amounts were discussed, from \$1 a month to \$1 a year.

The council liked the idea of letting the group lead the park's development, and gave Brookes direction to continue working on the draft lease and give Raetz a copy to consider. City Manager Jerry Gillham also wanted to know if the group would be willing to take over the entire park, a consideration which wasn't pursued during the meeting.

Gillham commended Raetz for the amount of work he does on behalf of the park.

Following the council meeting, Public Works Director Doug Grider explained that Westside Community Park's second phase includes a new soccer field and baseball fields directly to the south of the new subdivision located there. A third phase with a skateboard park and BMX park is also planned.

He said the cost to maintain the current park's phase one is between \$5,000 and \$7,500 annually, including caring for the soccer fields &ndash; using fertilizer, watering and replacing sprinkler heads &ndash; and other necessary maintenance.

Most of the costs are for equipment, he said.

"The man hours aren't that great," said Grider, estimating it requires between eight and 12 hours per week, a number that fluctuates according to the season.

Phase two, however, could have more substantial maintenance costs, he said.

Any savings of money or employee hours could help Grider's department, which may lose two park employees in the coming budget year due to the city's tight finances. E-mail Elizabeth Larson at [el Larson@lakeconews.com](mailto:el Larson@lakeconews.com).

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