

**TOWN OF CORTE MADERA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
CORTE MADERA TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
AUGUST 22, 2011
DRAFT MINUTES**

Commissioners

Present: Pam Fong, Chair
Kim Baez (arrived 7:05)
Joan Fray
Kitty Prosser
Hartley West
Brandon Louis, Youth Advocate

Staff

Present: Mario Fiorentini, Recreation Director
Shani Combs, Recreation Supervisor

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair Fong opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

2. OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION

There were no comments.

3. CONSENT CALENDAR

There were no Consent Calendar items.

4. PRESENTATIONS

- a. Presentation by Pat Ravasio Conceptual Plan for Corte Madera Plaza in old Youth Center Location

Ms. Pat Ravasio introduced Mr. Rich Perlstein, architect who has volunteered to help on the project. She stated they would like to move forward with the project although some of the amenities might have to be put on the “back-burner” for future funding. The plaza would provide a spot where people could gather and enjoy the new Café Verde.

Mr. Perlstein referred to the plan titled “Town Park Plaza”, dated August 15, 2011, and noted it looked finished but he reminded everyone that this is a process and the plan will evolve because of the feedback from staff, the Commission, the Town Council, and residents. He spoke to Café Verde’s architects and they indicated that the primary access to the café would be from the plaza side and not from Tamalpais Drive. Commissioner West asked if the owners of Benissimo’s and Café Verde were the same. Mr. Perlstein stated “yes”. He pointed to the property line and stated about nine feet of the land west of the building was owned by the Town. The plan is showing a walkway in that area and there would be a certain amount of coordination between the owners of the café and the plaza planners. He discussed the landscaping on the south side (Tamalpais Drive) of the plaza and noted it would provide some filtering of the noise from the road. In addition, the plan includes a fountain-type structure in that area. He pointed to the west side (Eastman Avenue) of the plaza and stated they are trying to do two things: 1) to make the plaza easily accessible; 2) to shield some of the views of the less desirable side of the Recreation Center. There will be continuous seating around some low plantings. The north side of the plaza would include a bocce ball court, shade trees, benches, and bike racks. He noted that Recreation Director Fiorentini had indicated that he would prefer that this area be designed for passive uses. The center of the plaza would include tables, benches, an arbor structure, a drinking fountain, and a gas fire-pit. He pointed out where the hanging flower baskets would be located. He discussed the existing parking lot, a shifted parking space,

and the possibility of four parallel parking spaces along Eastman Avenue. He acknowledged that there has been a conflict with park and Recreation Center users using the parking at the shopping center.

Ms. Ravasio stated that Town officials seem to be embracing the idea of the plaza because it would help to create an attractive, viable corner that would help uplift the Park Madera Center. It needs to be a nice, open, accessible area with open circulation. In addition, the merchants of the Park Madera Center must get on board with the idea of shared parking. She noted there were a lot of empty parking spaces, usually in the back, that are not often used. There should be ample parking for everyone. She noted the owners of Café Verde have agreed to take on the responsibility of maintaining the plaza (sweeping, cleaning, etc.) and the bocce ball court. They are also providing the tables and chairs. She stated there would be a need for Town Park to provide public rest rooms on the east side of the park. Mr. Perlstein pointed to an area referred to as “the barn” and stated this would be a good location for public rest rooms.

Commissioner Fray asked what time Café Verde would close at night. Ms. Ravasio stated the café would be open in the evening but they are counting on the mornings and lunch hours as their busiest time. They are hoping to do some carryout dinners that could be picked up on the way home. There are discussions about a beer and wine license. Commissioner Fray asked if the plaza would stay open all night. Ms. Ravasio stated it was an open, public area not unlike Town Park. She did not think it would be lit up at night. The owners of Café Verde will be paying for the utilities. These are issues that the Town Council will be looking at and the neighbors have expressed concern about noise, parking, late night events, garbage, etc.

Commissioner West asked how full the Town Park parking lot was on weekdays. Recreation Director Fiorentini stated he would guess it to be 50% full Monday through Friday weekdays and totally full on the weekends and weekday evenings. It depended upon the season. Mr. Perlstein stated the lot could be re-stripped to make it more efficient.

Chair Fong asked about the size of the plaza. Mr. Perlstein measured it out on the plans and stated it was about 4,800 square feet, excluding Café Verde.

Commissioner West asked about staff’s concerns about the bocce ball court. Recreation Director Fiorentini stated he met with Mr. Perlstein and Ms. Ravasio to discuss the project. Staff has concerns about the intent of the space and how it would be used. The Recreation Department does not want another facility that it would have to manage. He feels they do not have the parking and/or access to support another venue. He would prefer the plaza to be a “passive use” space that would not require any scheduling or rentals. He noted there is already a high level of congestion around Town Park and Recreation Center. He also has concerns about the parking along Eastman Avenue and the possibility of providing programmatic space that does not have a public rest room.

Commissioner Fray asked if there was a bocce ball court in Town Park. Recreation Director Fiorentini stated “no” but there are two horseshoe pits.

Recreation Director Fiorentini reported that the Conditional Use Permit for Café Verde allows them to operate from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. The Café and the plaza are separate entities and are completely separate projects.

Chair Fong asked about the projected cost of the project. Ms. Ravasio stated they received a ballpark cost estimate of \$160,000 but it could be double that by now. They are hoping to get a lot of the materials donated. She recommended they lay out the basics and budget for that. Amenities such as the water element, the gas fire pit, etc. could be stubbed out and installed when they get the funds. This project could be built in phases. Chair Fong stated once people see things going on they might want to get involved. Commissioner Baez asked if the Town would be willing to rough in the plumbing, etc. for the two specific locations. Ms. Ravasio stated that was written in the lease with Benissimo’s. Ms. Ravasio reminded everyone that the Town Council has not officially acted on the project.

Recreation Director Fiorentini stated the project would be on the next Town Council agenda and they plan to appoint an ad hoc committee consisting of Ms. Ravasio, a Commission liaison, a Town Council liaison, an Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) liaison, someone from the Beautification Committee, and others. The committee would review the plans, set up a priority list, discuss how to phase the project, estimate costs, etc. There would be a supplementary budget adjustment made to the Capital Improvements Budget to earmark the donated funds. It will be a Town directed project that would take shape according to the funding.

Commissioner West stated there seemed to be concerns about parking and traffic and she felt Café Verde would contribute to an increase in the vehicular traffic. She stated the plaza would be accessed mostly by pedestrians and cyclists and would not generate a lot of traffic. Recreation Director Fiorentini agreed and stated his concerns pertained to any expectations of the plaza being programmed and used as a venue. Mr. Perlstein stated parking for Café Verde is a part of the Madera Shopping Center.

Commissioner West stated she liked the idea of the bocce ball court and stated it could be used on a first-come, first-served basis. Commissioner Baez asked about the size of the court. Mr. Perlstein stated the court would be 50' long and a regulation-sized court is 80' long.

Ms. Carolyn Larson, member of the Beautification Committee, stated this plan has a lot going for it and she was in complete support. The design is beautiful and she looked forward to seeing it come to fruition. She stated the improvement to the property would increase real estate values in Town. She asked the Commission to endorse the project.

Ms. Robin Moller, landscape architect, stated she worked on the Recreation Center patio. She recently reviewed this plan and stated the design was stunning, well thought-out, and addressed many of the needs of the community. She referred to the maintenance of the plaza and noted in many ways it would take care of itself due to the coherent design. The plan gives a lot of thought to safety and security. She loves the water feature and stated the fire-pit would be fun. She added that it would be a huge improvement to what currently exists.

A Corte Madera resident who is a member of the Marin Economic Forum stated he supported the project.

Commissioner Baez stated the concept was wonderful. He was concerned about the lack of maintenance to the exterior of Benissimo's restaurant and he was reluctant to give them this part of the park. He was told that plans had been drawn up to renovate the front of the business but the owners of Benissimo's decided they could not afford to do the work. This makes him nervous since they are agreeing to maintain the plaza, the bocce ball court, etc. Ms. Ravasio stated this was a different issue and this was a separate project. The plaza will be at this location in perpetuity regardless of who owns Café Verde. It is, however, a good idea to hold them to a high standard. Mr. Perlstein stated he was very pleased with the plans for Café Verde. They are planning a complete renovation of the building, inside and out.

Commissioner Fray asked if Café Verde would be serving food in the plaza. Recreation Director Fiorentini stated their lease allows them to use the space but not exclusively. One does not have to patronize Café Verde to use the plaza. Mr. Perlstein discussed the concept of permeability and how people would filter in and out of the area- how open the area should be, how large the planters should be, etc. and he noted it was a balancing act with respect to closing off the space but not making it seem private.

Commissioner Baez stated the Depot Café in Mill Valley was fenced off and it was presumed that when one dines there they would buy food from the café and eat at the tables. He felt that very few people would bring food from somewhere else and eat at the plaza. He did not want the plaza to become an area that the Town would need to maintain. He asked how much of the maintenance Café Verde would be responsible for. Ms. Ravasio stated the lease states that they would maintain the plaza. Recreation Director Fiorentini stated the focus should not be on Café Verde since these issues would be handled by the Planning Commission. The focus should be on the plaza.

Chair Fong thanked Ms. Ravasio and Mr. Perlstein for their presentation.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

- A. Approve minutes from July 25, 2011 Meeting

M/s Prosser-Fong and approved (Baez and West abstained) to approve the July 25, 2011 meeting minutes as submitted.

6. ROUTINE AND OTHER MATTERS

- a. Status Reports- Town Council meetings: August

Commissioner Baez stated there were no items on the August Council agendas that pertained to the Commission or Recreation Department.

Commissioner Prosser stated she attended the August 16th meeting and the Mayor announced that the organization promoting the community garden has given up the idea of locating a garden in Town Park.

- b. Commissioners' Reports

There were no reports.

- c. Director's Report

Recreation Director Fiorentini stated the promoters of the community garden are going to redirect their efforts for a garden at the Porter Cooley property located off of Wornum Drive near the High Canal. It will not be an issue that would come before the Commission since it is not park property. He stated Spaghetti Night was a big success. Recreation Supervisor Combs stated there were close to 70 people in attendance. She did the cooking with the assistance of some of the Summer Playground Program staff.

- d. Future Agenda Items

Chair Fong stated the following item would be on an upcoming agenda: 1) Summer Playground Report- a Wrap-Up; 2) Discussion regarding the possible renaming of the Recreation Center.

- e. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Toni DeFrancis
Recording Secretary