

# TOWN OF LOS GATOS

## General Plan Update



### COMMUNITY PANEL

### FOCUS AREA WORKING PAPER

#### *PARKS & RECREATION*

#### **Introduction**

The Town of Los Gatos is conducting a focused update of its General Plan that addresses four key focus areas in the Town: Environment and Sustainability, Parks and Recreation, Youth Needs and Senior Needs. As part of the update process, the Town hosted a series of community panel discussions on Saturday, May 2, 2009, for each of the focus areas. The goal of the panels was to engage residents, experts and service providers in conversations about the community's needs and to identify potential solutions. This summary provides an overview of the discussion and suggested strategies that came out of the panel on Parks and Recreation.

#### **Panelists**

Four panelists participated on the Parks and Recreation panel discussion.

**Freddy Howell, Co-Owner, Wild Bird Center.** Ms. Howell has been the co-owner of the Wild Bird Center at the King's Court Center in Los Gatos since 1995. The Center presents outreach nature programs in local schools as well as in the store. Every Saturday, Ms. Howell leads birdwalks to the natural areas within the Santa Clara County Parks System. She is currently a member of the Education Committee of the Santa Clara Audubon Society and is a former director on their Board. She also serves as a substitute monitor for the Bay Area Bluebird Trail at Vasona.

**Marc Jensen, Representative, Outdoor Recreation in Los Gatos.** Mr. Jensen is a Medical Device Engineer and local dad. Mr. Jensen has been working on bike and pedestrian traffic safety since 1998. He has chaired the Town of Los Gatos Transportation Commission and the VTA Bike and Pedestrian Commission. He has also helped draft bicycle roadway design guidelines for the Santa Clara County VTA. In 2001 Mr. Jensen wrote the grant application for the sidewalk and bike lanes that were installed on Blossom Hill Road to help Fisher Junior High Students walk and ride their bikes safely to school. He organized walk- and bike-to-school events for the Los Gatos Union School District in 2000, 2001, and 2002. Mr. Jensen is an instructor certified by the League of American Bicyclists (LCI# 1799) and teaches Middle School Bike Skills classes in Los Gatos.

**Steve Rauwolf, Director, Los Gatos-Saratoga Community Education and Recreation Department.** Since 2002, Mr. Rauwolf has been Director of Los Gatos-Saratoga Community Education and Recreation Department (LGS Recreation). He has more than 25 years of experience in public administration and management. As Director of LGS Recreation, Mr. Rauwolf administers educational programs serving the communities of Los Gatos, Saratoga, Monte Sereno and Mountain View. In the past year, over 30,000 participants enjoyed the community education and recreation services of LGS Recreation. LGS Recreation programs serve all ages from preschool to 55+, and many interests, including arts, crafts, personal growth, dancing, fitness and sports.

**Ed San Juan, President, Los Gatos United Soccer League.** Mr. San Juan has lived in Santa Clara County since 1966 and still lives in the house in which he grew up. He is in his sixth year as President of the Los Gatos United Soccer League and is also currently Vice President of Operations. He has been involved with youth sports in Los Gatos since 1996 and the Los Gatos United Soccer League for the last 13 years. Mr. San Juan has sought to make the League a more organized group with more diversity among playing levels. He also focused on increasing the volunteer ranks and serving both competitive and recreational players. The League works hard to address community concerns and to make sure that the League is a great community partner.

### **Panel Discussion**

This section summarizes the key topics discussed during the panel on Parks and Recreation. The panel was conducted informally. Panelists responded to questions from the moderator, Joanna Jansen of Design, Community & Environment, and community members in attendance.

#### *Valued Parks and Recreational Facilities in Los Gatos*

- ◆ Belgatos Park is a beautiful park with excellent habitat for wildlife. Currently, there are Red Shouldered Hawk nesting in eucalyptus trees.
- ◆ Vasona Park is a heavily used urban park, and serves as a refuge for nesting and migratory birds.
- ◆ The Creek Trail is a “Town jewel” and can be highlighted as a major amenity to all Town residents.
- ◆ The new boating dock operated by Santa Clara County Parks is being well-used for sailboat and kayak activities.
- ◆ The Neighborhood Center is very active, with senior programs, a small-town feel, and a good location in the heart of the town.
- ◆ The Teen Center by Los Gatos High School is actively used and enjoyed by youth.
- ◆ The available playing fields are great and well maintained. The support of schools is also important to the provision of recreational spaces for youth, including indoor space and shared playing fields for youth sports.

- ◆ The pool is a great benefit to the community.
- ◆ The Terraces of Los Gatos works very well as a social and active place for seniors.

#### *Youth and Families Needs*

- ◆ Youth soccer is growing fast and the Town is short on fields; four fields are used for over 100 teams and there are about 68 games per weekend. A field is needed in the spring.
- ◆ Soccer fields must meet playing field quality standards to maintain Division I standing.
- ◆ Encourage more kids to get outside. Exercising more in general helps lower incidences of heart disease and lowers costs to the community.
- ◆ Families have higher use rates of recreational facilities than other recreational facilities user groups.
- ◆ Consider strategies to secure daytime indoor space for the changing population, such as increasing coordination with senior groups. There has been an increase in the youth population using recreational facilities and programs. In general, Los Gatos needs more daytime indoor space, such as preschools, places for seniors to take educational classes and places for seniors to socialize. Los Gatos also needs facilities for daytime activities for families with very young children. These facilities are particularly needed for times when school facilities are unavailable for use.
- ◆ Baseball, soccer and other sports compete for limited field space in the spring. The Town needs a recreational soccer field.

#### *Recreational Trails and Pedestrian Connections*

- ◆ The top recreational activity in Los Gatos is walking. Downtown Los Gatos is good for walking, but suburbs are not good for walking. Young people and seniors cannot get around safely and often feel trapped. We need more sidewalks; funding sidewalks should be a priority because sidewalks are used by all age groups.
- ◆ People speed on Lark Avenue, and currently bike lanes and sidewalks are provided on only portions of the Avenue.
- ◆ The Los Gatos Creek Trail doesn't meet current Class I bikeway design standards; bicyclists should not use the Trail on weekends.
- ◆ Trails need to be safe for seniors.
- ◆ Sometimes there are conflicts between user groups such as hikers, cyclists, dog walkers and children, on trails in Los Gatos.
- ◆ Los Gatos values its Downtown and connections to Downtown.

*Town Collaboration on Open Space and Recreational Facilities*

- ◆ Find a balance between passive and active recreation.
- ◆ Preserve Los Gatos' open space.
- ◆ Consolidate efforts among community organizations and Town departments and pull together leadership to disseminate information. A primary coordinator would be ideal.
- ◆ More participation is needed. Parents are often more involved than other users of recreational facilities in public recreation issues.
- ◆ Riparian areas along Los Gatos Creek are important – don't cut down the trees in order to widen trails and improve access. Consider creek restoration.
- ◆ Celebrate the parks and the environment in Los Gatos.

*Good Examples from Other Communities*

- ◆ The City of San Jose is developing community gardens throughout the City.
- ◆ Artificial turf can be more durable and require less maintenance. Redwood City is currently changing from natural grass to artificial turf and is reducing pesticides and fertilizer in stormwater run-off. Los Gatos United Soccer League spends \$10,000 per field per year for maintenance and also needs to be closed during that time to allow the natural turf to regrow.
- ◆ Red Morton Park in Redwood City is a good park example of an all inclusive park that serves a broad variety of community needs.

**Suggested Policies and Action Items**

This section summarizes the panelists' suggestions for policies or actions that may be considered for inclusion in the General Plan Update process. These suggestions are organized by the topics discussed in the Panel Discussion section above.

*Valued Parks and Recreational Facilities in Los Gatos*

- ◆ Continue to promote school support of recreational facilities for youth in the town.

*Youth and Families Needs*

- ◆ Promote the Safe-Routes-To-School program.
- ◆ Increase the amount of active recreational fields space; leverage partnerships to make this happen.

*Recreational Trails and Pedestrian Connections*

- ◆ Promote the Los Gatos Creek Trail and connections to the Trail.
- ◆ Los Gatos needs to plan for future parking and traffic needs:
  - Consider more bicycle/pedestrian bridges.
  - Look at connection between Vasona Park and the freeway – analyze choke points.
- ◆ Narrow Winchester Boulevard and add street trees and bicycle paths.
- ◆ Host a trail design competition for Los Gatos Creek Trail.
- ◆ Place decomposed granite next to concrete or asphalt trails.
- ◆ Make Los Gatos Boulevard a walking district.
- ◆ Improve connections, particularly from Downtown to east Los Gatos.
- ◆ Promote walkable neighborhoods and more local amenities.
- ◆ Create kiosks and interpretative signage as opportunities to educate trail users about trail etiquette, the Los Gatos environment and Los Gatos’ parks and recreational facilities.
- ◆ Patrol trails with radar to enforce speed limits.

*Town Collaboration on Open Space and Recreational Facilities*

- ◆ Promote and maintain strong collaboration among the Town departments, particularly with the Department of Public Works, to keep providing parks in the town.
- ◆ Build partnerships with private businesses or churches to use fields.

*Good Examples from Other Communities*

- ◆ Explore alternative types of turf for fields that require less maintenance.
- ◆ Integrate Los Gatos Creek into the Downtown, similar to the Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.
- ◆ Consider closing gaps by creating connections such as pedestrian bridges over Highway 17 that link major corridors or uses.
- ◆ Develop and support community gardens.