



Santa Cruz Bird Club

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To Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Committee,

12/11/23

So sorry for submitting this so late, just a day before your meeting on the San Lorenzo Park Redesign, but the recommended layout was only released Friday December 8 and was a complete surprise. Based on the San Lorenzo Park Redesign Process (on p 88 of your agenda packet), a preferred plan wasn't to be released until after the public meetings? As citizens we were asked by Parks and Rec Dept. to comment on Concept A and B which the Santa Cruz Bird club did and is in your packet; this letter now seems irrelevant due to your unannounced and unexpected release of a recommended layout. We have appreciated past efforts by Parks and Rec to keep communication channels clear and the process transparent. So in light of this last minute non-communicated change in plans by Parks and Rec, here are some additional comments on the new Recommended Layout:

1. The Santa Cruz Bird Club still believes and the data supports a full restoration of the riverlands-benchlands between the river and the bike path. There should be NO multi-use lawn or any other features/recreational opportunities that are not supportive of or interfere with wildlife in a naturally restored area. This includes a "Slide in slope", #12 on the layout diagram. The online survey #2 shows that the "thing" that folks are most excited about the new park after Safety and Cleanliness is RESTORATION AND WILDLIFE.
2. It makes more sense from our perspective and that of wildlife to use area #8 on the Recommended Layout Diagram for a multi-use lawn –there is parking and it is away from the Riverlands–perfect for events, food trucks etc.
3. We are also concerned that some Play, Fitness and Recreation uses are not complementary with and supportive of the Riverlands restoration these include Pickleball (loud/ <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/09/1181246866/pickleball-noise-problem-courts-bats-play>) and basketball, when there are already courts downstream at the Skatepark. Disk golf practice facilities, if incorporated, need to be in the upland area of the park and not in the riverlands for all of the same reasons: active recreation and natural areas cannot coexist–Natural areas require less activity and more quiet than recreation areas generate. Picnic tables should also be placed in uplands as food scraps and trash will attract unwanted wildlife (crows, ravens, feral cats and dogs) to a wildlife area. Placing all recreation/picnicing in the uplands supports the wildlife and flood control values we are all looking for in the riverlands.

4. Based on the last minute change in the otherwise transparent process to redesign San Lorenzo Park, we request that the Recommend Layout released Dec 8, not be accepted or acted upon by the Park Commission until citizenry have had a chance to see, evaluate and act on it. Waiting until the next Park Commission meeting in February and allowing additional communication and dialogue in the meantime will facilitate this.
5. Furthermore, the final decision on the park design should wait until it is reviewed by the San Lorenzo River Levee Task Force. Santa Cruz Public Works Staff is supposed to update the City Council in the first Quarter of 2024 with a plan of action to re-establish the San Lorenzo River Task Force. As the city information report of 8/31/23 states: "As the San Lorenzo River touches many City Departments and is popular with many groups and residents, the new task force would need to include a multi-department, multijurisdiction approach" This is exactly what is needed to evaluate the final Park redesign before it is approved. The previous incarnation of the Task force was "focused on the planning, management and long-term process for improving the San Lorenzo River." This is exactly what is needed to ensure that the San Lorenzo River Park Redesign is incorporated into the overall river vision and ecology.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Sheridan, Santa Cruz Bird Club, President
Jane Orbuch, Santa Cruz Bird Club, Conservation Officer