

## **An Open Letter to San Diego County Parks & Recreation Department**

### **Re: Proposed Alpine County Park Concept Plan**

In January 2021, the County presented the final draft concept plan for the new Alpine County Park to be developed at 2480 South Grade Road in Alpine. It incorporated many of the ideas that Alpine residents had suggested at earlier meetings but it did not include to our knowledge any baseline studies of the infrastructure needed to maintain the park as designed in a safe and sustainable way, particularly around water usage, wildfire, and traffic safety concerns.

As community leaders and residents of Alpine, the below signatories to this letter request that the County provide the Alpine Community Planning Group and its subcommittees with the baseline assessments for creating safe and sustainable conditions to and from the proposed park, with consideration especially to the key concerns of water sourcing and estimated usage of water at the new park, as well as traffic studies and proposed roadway improvements along this section of South Grade Road. Listed here are the issues we believe **MUST BE RESOLVED** before construction begins or capital expenditures are made for this project.

#### **1. Water Resources**

- a. The design with hundreds of trees and several acres of grass will require large amounts of water. If municipal water is provided by Padre Dam, its cost, estimated at many tens of thousands of dollars per year, will be a significant burden on taxpayers. The use of potable water for irrigation is highly questionable in San Diego County where such water is precious. If possible, the County should use reclaimed water for irrigation needs and/or significantly downsize the area where irrigation is needed.
- b. Should a well be drilled to supply this park with water, the County should drill test wells to establish how much water is available in this area and design the park accordingly. Assuming that wells will perform as needed has proved a poor assumption for many homeowners in Alpine in the past. Should a well be drilled, we request that a full environmental impact study be conducted to examine the potential effects on the surrounding groundwater table, and that a hydrologic assessment be done to analyze the impacts to private homeowners and existing wellheads nearby.

#### **2. Wildfire Risk**

- a. When more people gather in the park, the probability that they ignite a fire increases. The potential for a fire to spread across Wright's Field into homes is an extreme hazard. To mitigate this added risk, fire hydrants must be available for fire fighters in numerous key locations, particularly on the east side of the developed parkland adjacent to the open-space land, which is for much of the year a dry grassland. Installation of water holding tanks are a necessity, both for firefighting and for water reserve should any well(s) slow down or dry up. Water needs for firefighting efforts should be prioritized over irrigation needs.
- b. Any activities involving fire, such as barbecue pits, must not be included in the design. The latter provide only a minor benefit to park users but in a very high fire risk area such as Alpine this represents an unnecessary risk to neighboring properties. We request that the County adopt a "no open flames" policy for the Alpine County Park, and that it be vigorously enforced.

### 3. Traffic Safety

#### a. Traffic Calming Measures

The location of this park along a two-lane rural road creates major safety issues related to the increase in traffic to this part of Alpine. Currently, South Grade Road is a dangerous roadway, and traffic calming and safety measures need to be implemented in concert with Department of Public Works to accommodate the increased traffic from this new park. If public roads are to be the primary means of getting to and from this park, then traffic studies need to be conducted, a risk assessment done, and roadway conditions improved with a focus on traffic calming and pedestrian safety. Peoples' lives are at stake here. If this is truly a park for the children of Alpine, everything possible should be done to make sure that the youth of Alpine can get safely to and from this new park.

#### b. Pedestrian Safety

Alpine has had three fatalities in the past ten years on this section of South Grade Road. Thus far, the Department of Public Works has not adequately addressed the current and future safety issues along this two-lane rural road due to increased traffic from park use. With estimated use planned to be several hundred people on average-use days and several thousand people on peak-use days, the traffic impacts to this narrow, winding road will be significantly more dangerous to both motorists and pedestrians. We urge the County agencies to work collaboratively on roadway improvements that improve pedestrian safety along this section of South Grade Road. Crosswalks at both park entrances should be considered, along with bike lanes, additional signage, and DG sidewalks where possible.

Therefore, we the signatories to this letter, urge the County to reconsider the current park concept plan with a focus on prioritizing wildfire safety, water conservation, and traffic calming measures as top priorities in the development and operation of any new Alpine park.

By signing this letter our organizations formally request that additional preliminary studies be conducted to assess resource availability for the Alpine County Park site proposed at 2480 South Grade Road. A detailed assessment of the available resources including potable water source and estimated costs per year for irrigation, wildfire safety considerations, including placement of fire hydrants and basis of need for barbecue pits, etc. as well as traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures proposed for South Grade Road. The results of the preliminary analysis and a long-term assessment of costs should be provided in writing to the Chairperson of the Alpine Community Planning Group, Parks and Recreation Subcommittee Chair, and to the general public.

We look forward to the results of your resource assessment and associated cost projections for the new County Park.

Signatories:



G. A. Neville Connell

On behalf of the Board of the Greater Alpine Fire Safe Council:

Jon Winslow, Vicki Murphy, Betty Murphy, Jeff Forbes, Ken Gilden, and Sharon Root