



APPROVED

**MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
January 26, 2010
City Hall
250 Hamilton Ave**

Commissioners Present: Pat Markevitch, Paul Losch, Daria Walsh, Sunny Dykwel, Deidre Crommie, Joel Davidson

Commissioners Absent: Carl King

Others Present: Council Liaison Karen Holman

Staff Present: Rob de Geus, Robert Ward, Catherine Bourquin

I. ROLL CALL CONDUCTED BY: Catherine Bourquin

II. AGENDA CHANGES, REQUESTS, and DELETIONS: None

II. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS: None

IV. BUSINESS:

1. **Approval of the Draft Minutes of November 20, 2009 Annual Retreat** – The Draft Minutes of the November 20, 2009 Annual retreat was approved. **Approved 5:1 abstention (Davidson)**
2. **Approval of Draft Minutes of the December 15, 2009 regular meeting**– The Draft Minutes of the December 15, 2009 regular meeting was approved. **Approved 5:1 abstention (Davidson)**

Commissioner Chair Markevitch welcomed new Council Liaison Holman.

3. **Recommendation to Council for the renaming of Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza** - Staff Betts briefly described the reason for the recommendation for the renaming of Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza and provided some history on the renaming policy. Staff felt that the choice of renaming the plaza to Thoits Plaza fell within the three criteria in

the renaming policy. This brief overview was followed by oral communications from the public.

Oral Communications

Chop Keenan, 700 Emerson, Palo Alto – Mr. Keenan provided some background information of the Thoits family and how he felt they were an acceptable choice for the renaming of Lytton Plaza. He was in support of this recommendation.

Jim Burch, 177 Hemlock, Palo Alto – Mr. Burch came before the Commission to make an alternative suggestion for the plaza. He suggested that a plaque be created and read it to the Commission the wording acknowledged the history behind Lytton and a brief description of the contributions of the Thoits family. His suggestion for a name would be University Plaza.(Attached)

Roger Smith, 270 Tennyson, Palo Alto – Mr. Smith came before the Commission to give his support for renaming Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza.

Winter Dellenbach, La Para, Palo Alto – Ms. Dellenbach was opposed to the renaming of the plaza and felt that renaming it to Thoits Plaza did not meet all the criteria.

Elaine Meyer, 609 Kingsley Ave – Ms. Meyer wanted to express her disappointment on how this renaming did not follow the procedures set forth in the policy. The Neighborhood Associations were to be notified of this request. She is on the neighborhood association and just found out about this renaming tonight. She also expressed not understanding how a Commissioner could be able to vote on this when they were involved with the remodeling of Lytton Plaza. She was not in support of renaming Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza.

Emily Renzel, 1056 Forest, Palo Alto – Ms. Renzel spoke on the history in place for Lytton Plaza. She felt that Lytton already has its own history and renaming shouldn't take this history away. She received an anonymous letter from a resident and read it to the commission (attached). Ms. Renzel doesn't feel that renaming the plaza to Thoits should be considered.

Rebecca Counihan, 836 Ramona Street, Palo Alto – Ms. Counihan spoke on behalf of the Government Action Committee for the Chamber of Commerce. She spoke of honoring the history of business in the committee and how the Thoits family were pioneers for Palo Alto. She was in favor of renaming the plaza to Thoits Plaza.

Geneveve Jiopanda, 122 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto – Ms. Jiopanda works in marketing development for the Chamber of Commerce. She briefly described her

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experience and the pride she has witnessed in the residents of Palo Alto. She stated some of the contributions that the Thoits family has made for Palo Alto and felt that it was an acceptable suggestion to rename Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza.

Duncan Matterson, 620 Sand Hill Road, Palo Alto – Mr. Matterson spoke on the relationship he shared with Warren Thoits and the contributions the family made to Palo Alto. He urged the commission to consider renaming Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza.

Robert Moss, 4010 Orme Street, Palo Alto – Mr. Moss felt that there is a lot of history in Palo Alto and would have liked to see alternative suggestions made. There were a number of people that could have been considered and would like to have this be considered before choosing the name Thoits.

Herb Borock, P.O. Box 632, Palo Alto – Spoke on encouraging the commission to look for alternative spaces in the city to name after the Thoits family. Leave the Lytton Plaza as it is.

The discussion was then opened up to the Commissioners. Commissioner Losch opened up the discussion by stating that he was going to vote against the recommendation. He believed that there were two separate issues that needed to be addressed. The first is should Lytton Plaza be renamed, and the second, if yes to the first question, what alternative names meet the criteria set forth in the Renaming Policy. Losch added that he understands that we need to acknowledge the Thoits family but he believed the three criteria have not been met. Staff Betts clarified by noting that after each criteria statement there is an “or” meaning it needs to meet one of the criteria statements to be considered. Commissioner Losch ended with his first comment that he would not be voting yes on this recommendation.

Council Liaison Holman directed a question to staff on the procedural requirements of the Commission from the direction of Council at the meeting last night referring to the dedication of the Anna Zschokke plaza. Staff Betts commented by clarifying the direction of Council last night in that the question at hand was to approve the parcel of land as dedicated park land. The naming of the plaza was accepted. The attorney is looking into the issue of the dedication and will be coming back to the Commission with two alternatives, either it be considered dedicated park land or a City facility.

Commissioner Dykwel commented on her position as a commissioner and her involvement with the Lytton Plaza renovation. She said when the Lytton Plaza renovation came before the Commission she recused herself from the discussion because of her involvement with the Friends. She added that she has no business dealings and no monetary gain from the Thoits and feels that this is not a conflict of interest for her. She continued by commenting on an article she wrote on the Thoits

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family and fully supports the renaming of Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza. She felt there was no strong opposition to the renaming.

Commissioner Davidson commented that he isn't into renaming and hasn't heard of the Thoits family until now. He feels concern over the opposition he is hearing from the public on this issue.

Commissioner Walsh asked a question on how the Anna Zschokke renaming had been initiated. Staff Betts provided some background information on the issue. The discussion continued and staff de Geus made a suggestion to help move the discussion along by clarifying what the commissioners were to vote on this evening. He said that the objective tonight was to answer the following question - is there a compelling reason to rename Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza. Commissioner Losch expressed his concern that there were two distinct questions; one should we rename Lytton plaza, and two is Thoits Plaza the appropriate name to rename it to. These two questions are being asked as one tonight.

Commissioner Crommie felt torn on the issue and will have to vote against it tonight. The information before the Commission tonight isn't compelling enough to change the name. She isn't disagreeing that Thoits doesn't deserve in some way to be acknowledged for their contributions to Palo Alto but what is before the commission tonight isn't compelling enough to make that decision. Commissioner Markevitch asked the question "Has every procedural step been followed?" Staff Betts answered "I believe so."

Commissioner Losch called the question to stop the discussion. Commissioner Markevitch called for a vote on the question. Failed 2:4

The discussion continued with Commissioner Walsh asking if there was any conflict to Commissioner Dykwels position on the subject. It was agreed that commissioners can have strong feelings for topics that come before the commission and can advocate for them. Staff Betts requested to clarify a question that Commissioner Walsh had raised on if there were any other facilities, etc that are coming up that will need to be named? He answered it by saying that there are developments that continue to evolve and the Historical Association typically oversees the process unless it involves a Parks or Recreation space. At some point in the future there might be a facility that will come up for a chance to name. Commissioner Dykwel wanted to reiterate that this has had enough press for the public to come forward with more opposition than it has. The ordinance states that it has to come from the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Historical Association. Commissioners Markevitch and Losch added that from the Palo Alto online there was opposition that was viewed by them.

Commissioner Dykwel made the motion seconded by Commissioner Markevitch

Motion: The Parks and Recreation Commission recommend to Council the renaming of Lytton Plaza to Thoits Plaza.

Motion failed 2: 4 (Crommie, Losch, Davidson, Walsh)

4. Update on Community Task Force – Project Safety Net relating to youth and teen health and wellness -

Staff de Geus provided an update to the Commission on Project Safety Net and acknowledged the recent suicide that took place over the weekend. He added that our sympathy goes out to the family and we thank the mother for her courage in coming forward with some history into the young man's mental state. It was important to know because 90% of all suicides result from mental illness. Staff de Geus mentioned that the task force attended a conference put on by a Dr. Liberman. There were some guidelines that were handed out for parents that de Geus shared with the Commission. He noted that it is on the website and is a simple helpful fact sheet. The future role of the Commission on this topic is providing feedback to the task force. It's possible that the task force will make one or more policy recommendations that the Parks and Recreation Commission can evaluate and recommend to Council. The Commission acknowledged de Geus' involvement and thanked him.

5. Update on City Park closures -

Staff Ward, Interim Division Manager for Open Space and Parks gave an update on City Park closures. On the list was College Terrace Library being renovated and a new brick pathway and irrigation is being installed.

Greer Park Phase 4's contract was awarded and the project is slated to be completed within 270 days with an effort to phase some soccer fields open in advance of the entire project being completed. The park will be closing within the next couple of days, January 27th.

The Mitchell Park Library/Community Center construction documents are 95% completed. Once these documents are completed, bids will be solicited. The well project at El Camino is on target to begin August 2010. Contractors working with our Utility Department were in the process of completing geological boring tests to a depth of 500 feet in preparation for installing the emergency well this summer.

V. COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Commissioner Davidson thanked the Commission and the community for their involvement. He thanked staff for their hard work and has been impressed by the City's program's and staff dedication.
2. Staff de Geus announced that summer camp registration is underway.

VI. TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR REGULAR MEETING ON February 23, 2010

1. Welcoming of new Commissioners
2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair
3. Community Task Force Update
4. Recreational dog owner update
5. Discussion of how to structure Council/Commission meeting.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Adjourned 9:10 pm