



## REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

**DATE:** JANUARY 28, 2009

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** GREG RAMIREZ, CITY MANAGER 

**BY:** AMY BRINK, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES 

**SUBJECT:** DISCUSSION ON RECREATION CENTER SITE FEASIBILITY STUDY

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The existing Agoura Hills Recreation Center is a 3,500 square foot facility that serves thousands of individuals each year. Tots, youth, teens, adults, and seniors visit the Recreation Center daily to seek a variety of community services. Residents and community members visiting include seniors who need help in preparing their taxes, adults who desire to sign up a toddler for their first class, or a young student who is looking for volunteer opportunities. Some individuals utilize the Agoura Hills Recreation Center simply as a gateway into a new community, as they need to familiarize themselves with the local services that are offered here in this town in which they just moved. Or, someone may have had some extra time on their hands and just wants to join a discussion group, or chat with whoever may be at the center that day. Whatever the reason for their visit, the Agoura Hills Recreation Center is a lifeline to many community residents.

The Agoura Hills Recreation Center is also where the City of Agoura Hills' full-time Department of Community Services staff work daily to administer these services to the residents of Agoura Hills. The Department of Community Services is responsible for a range of services that include: recreational classes, afterschool activities, community special events, volunteer programs, Community Concert Band, Healthy City and One City/One Book programs, senior social services, Senior Advisory Committee, Youth Council, summer day camp programs, city transportation services, school holiday programs, adult sports programs, park playground facilities and landscapes, Old Agoura Equestrian Arena, Agoura High School Tennis Courts, and the Reyes Adobe Historical Site, which includes administering public tours, collecting artifacts, managing a docent program, offering special events, and maintaining the beautiful grounds. With so many services implemented through this department, the Agoura Hills Recreation Center also serves as a "Care and Shelter" location for the city's Emergency Response Team.

The current Agoura Hills Recreation Center, built in 1991, sits on a property with a land lease that will expire in 2014. The property has easy accessibility, is close to neighborhoods and local schools, and is extremely versatile. The facility, itself, has one multi-purpose room that can be divided into three sections, which are programmed from early in the morning to late in the evening, six days a week. There is an outdoor space that participants turn into a make shift lunch area and children's playground. Unfortunately, the area lacks any real play equipment for children or proper picnic tables. Along with housing the full-time and many part-time staff, this facility is responsible for offering hundreds of programs and activities to people of all ages.

Over the years, staff has managed to answer the demand for a variety of programs to residents. There is, however, a demand for activities that the department finds extremely challenging to offer due to a lack of space. These programs include an expanded adult program, preschool/mommy n' me program, teen activities, and children's camp programs offered when schools are closed.

At the May 23, 2007, annual Budget Workshop, the City Council made an economic commitment to begin reserving funds for the construction of a new Agoura Hills Recreation Center. The City Council recognized that it was going to need to construct a facility in order to house the Department of Community Services and its vital operations. To date, the City has managed to reserve approximately \$3 million in a special fund for this project. Because the project would not commence for nearly 3 years, staff anticipates the City Council reserving (saving) additional funds as well as seeking grant funds if necessary to complete the project. During this same Budget Workshop, the City Council gave direction to staff to commission an architectural firm to complete a site feasibility study for the new Agoura Hills Recreation Center. The purpose of the study would be to identify three viable locations for a new recreation center within the city limits. A study of this nature would give the City Council an objective look at the constructability, environmental impacts and potential characteristics of a facility for each identified site. In short, it would be a starting point for open discussions with the community.

On November 14, 2007, the City Council formally approved the agreement with CWA, Inc., to conduct a site feasibility study with the intent to introduce three viable sites to the City Council. Over the course of nine months, staff worked with CWA, Inc., to identify opportunities and challenges that each of the sites could present, including, but not limited to economic, constructability, and environmental issues. The intention was to identify these issues to make future discussions more meaningful and effective.

Every site listed in the study was evaluated for a variety of characteristics, including, but not limited to the cost of the site, location in the city, the size of the parcel, and, most importantly, the impact on neighborhoods. Minimizing impacts such as traffic, noise, and visual effects of the building on the neighborhood, was a priority in order to make the new recreation center successful. CWA, Inc., utilized a weighted point system to rank the potential of the twenty-one sites identified. The scoring was based on four factors: Site, Environmental, Facility, and Intrinsic points. When evaluating the Site factor on each piece of land, the cost to acquire and grade it, if necessary, size of the parcel, and the utility availability, all played an important role. The Environmental factor evaluation included the location in the city, proximity to complimentary programming (i.e., parks, ball fields, playgrounds, etc.), traffic impacts, and pedestrian friendliness. The Facility factor addresses the logistical elements of a new building, which include the allowable size, the open space that will be taken away by building a recreation center on that piece of land, the potential to expand, and bonus programming opportunities. Lastly, there was an Intrinsic factor included in the ranking system that was defined by City staff and took into account many factors such as programming and desirability of the sites from a local perspective. The Intrinsic Points in the study are based on the fundamental values of parks and recreation. There was a great deal of analysis of commercial locations and how a recreation center would function next to an industrial, or manufacturing site or other commercial activities. From a land use perspective, staff highly discourages the location be near "heavier" uses such as

a lumber yard. A location in an area within a lower intensity use, where it can be buffered adequately, is much more desired. Location characteristics may also include a grass area, play equipment, quiet places to sit, picnic tables, basketball courts, or even a baseball field. The goal is to create a facility where the surrounding elements are conducive to a community center.

At the January 14, 2009 City Council meeting, at the request of Councilmember Schwarz, the City Council approved a motion to discuss the center's new location sooner than later. After several meetings and extended discussions regarding the significant public feedback, other site alternatives and financial considerations, the Community Services Committee is recommending that city parks be removed from the list of potential sites for the new Agoura Hills Recreation Center. They will also provide further feedback to the City Council on how they feel the City should proceed with this process during this discussion item.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff respectfully recommends the City Council discuss the item and provide direction to staff.