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*Elysian
Park
Committee* **Notes**

September, 2000

Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park (CCSEP)

No. 121

Mt. Bike Study Completed Access Remains A Threat

After meeting half a dozen times since February over a period of three months, a group convened to develop guidelines for mountain bike access on city park trails has concluded its work. A report chronicling their work is due soon before the Recreation and Parks Commission. The 20 member volunteer "working group" which represented mountain bike (5) equestrian (5) and hiker/environmental (10) interests met regularly with city Department of Recreation and Parks staff but had trouble agreeing on much of anything as the mountain bike advocates would brush off any concerns the hiker/environmentalists and equestrians brought up.

Members of the Concerned Off-Road Bike Association insisted that CORBA has a group that voluntarily patrols trails and keeps bikers riding safely and on the trails. Yet there are no records to document any of this. Other members of the "working group", by contrast, produced reams of research material detailing how many park agencies from local to national had been revisiting their permitted mountain bike trails due to safety, enforcement and environmental damage problems. Most notable among recent trail closures to mountain bikes were very popular ones in Boulder, Colorado (the birthplace of mountain biking) and Banf National Park in Canada. Called the jewel of all mountain bike trails, the one in Banf was closed because the bikers were displacing wolves and grizzly bears.

The Recreation and Parks staff continued to press for the group to formulate Trail Access Guidelines for mountain bikes, even though it was apparent by all documentation presented that mountain bike access was inappropriate for the relatively small and densely used urban park system as a whole. When the staff's report is presented to the Recreation and Parks Commission, anti-mountain bike advocates are expected to present their arguments to the Commission as well. These views would not be new to the commissioners. For their February 16 Board meeting, thirty angry Elysian Park users traveled, in spite of torrential rain, to the North Waddington Park Recreation Center in North Hollywood to testify before these same park commissioners on the inappropriateness of allowing mountain bikes on Elysian Park trails. At that meeting, Commission President and Mayoral candidate Steve Soboroff made an informal statement that the staff's previously proposed mountain bike pilot program in Elysian Park was inappropriate and that staff should continue to look for an alternate location. ◀

Save The Date Nov. 18 Tree Planting

The Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park will sponsor its annual tree planting and dedication ceremony on Saturday, Nov. 18 at 2 P.M. Little Solano Box Canyon will once again be the planting site. As part of the 1992 Los Angeles County Prop A bond money improvements in this section of Elysian Park, a dead-end road was removed and replaced with turf last year, making this canyon a truly private and lovely place.

The Department of Recreation and Parks will plant the trees which can be chosen from a select variety. Because of past problems with breakage, Rec & Parks has also stipulated that the trees must be a larger 24"x24" box size at a cost of around \$120 each unless they are planted on a hillside, in which case a smaller 15 gallon size at a cost of around \$40 could be chosen. Both tree selection and size are limited to their proposed location, so please call early for the best choice. The deadline for ordering is November 1. To plant a tree for yourself or a loved one call Mary at (323) 667-0867. ◀

Park Rangers Fight to Retain Their Jobs

Rec & Parks Dept. proposal would transfer Ranger duties to LAPD

A proposal to transfer the majority of Park Ranger duties to the Los Angeles Police Department has brought negative reaction first before the Police Commissioner on June 6, then subsequently on August 9 before the Recreation and Parks Commission. Both meetings were attended by a number of rangers who testified against the proposal and community and park activists including representatives from the Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park who also supported the rangers in their current capacity. Supposedly to increase park safety, the Memorandum of Agreement between Recreation and Parks General Manager Ellen Oppenheim and Chief of Police Bernard Parks proposes to virtually strip the park rangers of

all law enforcement citation authority with the exception of off-leash dogs and parking violations. Currently, park rangers handle drunk and disorderly and lewd behavior, theft, burglary and a number of other crimes 95% of the time without the need for LAPD officer assistance. A 1995 City Administrative Officer Report on Park Security states that in the 6 month period from June 1995 through November, 1995, of the 2,802 calls received for service within parks, only 120 or 4% were referred to LAPD for police officer action.

The argument for the MOA is that it will increase safety both in our parks and for our park rangers. One could argue that it will have exactly the opposite effect. At the Police Commissioner's June 6 meeting there was some question

as to how this would affect an already stretched-to-the maximum officer deployment. Commission President Gerald Chaleff ordered that a study be done and the results brought back before the commission. Even before the results are in, however, the commissioners' general sentiment was skeptical that LAPD has the resources to prioritize drunk or disorderly conduct or even theft or burglary that is non weapon related or non-life threatening, bringing to question how the parks or rangers would be made safer if the rangers were stripped of their current authority to handle these crimes.

When the MOA came before the Rec. and Parks Commission on August 9, additional issues were raised such as the difference between

► *See Park Rangers, page 3*

LAUSD Proposed High School Threatens Elysian Park

Just when it seems that Elysian Park has been on the receiving end of every possible horrendous proposal, another monster rears its ugly head. The monster, in this case, is the Los Angeles Unified School District. In the wake of the new Belmont High environmental meltdown which has halted construction on the sorely needed new school, LAUSD announced in March that it is considering Barlow Hospital and Dodger Parking Lots 23 and 25 located behind Barlow between Scott and Elysian Park Avenues for potential high school sites! Both of these would severely impact the park by virtue of the traffic mess a 1200-student facility would create on Stadium Way twice a day. Thousands of commuters would be stalled bumper to bumper to allow for extended cross traffic from potential students either west or east of the park via Scott, Elysian

Park Ave. or Academy Road. Air pollution from vehicle exhaust would likely increase tenfold.

In a strange turn of events, the Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park, Solano Community Association, Echo Park Chamber of Commerce and Central City Action Committee, all longstanding community organizations, have joined forces with the Dodgers. Along with Barlow Hospital, the coalition intends to fight these ill-conceived proposed school sites. Besides the potential for tremendous park degradation, other major negative issues include student safety (having to cross freeway-like traffic either in a car or on foot), long and arduous access by foot and lack of any public transportation.

After meeting with Howard Miller, LAUSD Chief Operating Officer, in mid April where a myriad of concerns fell on his deaf ears, several coalition members as well as the CEO of Barlow testified at a

School Board Site Selection Committee meeting where their impassioned comments were similarly noted and ignored. Many members of the coalition attended a full Board meeting as well where a proposed feasibility study for the Dodger site was scheduled for a vote. Many were prepared to speak in opposition but never did as the item was pulled from the agenda. It has not been rescheduled. That meeting was in late April.

In the course of May and June, consultants from Tierra Concepts (hired by LAUSD) held meetings in the community to "receive community input." These meetings fell short of that goal, becoming instead additional attempts to push LAUSD's agenda. Many attendees had legitimate questions that were never answered such as: How have you determined that these sites are central to the high school population to be served? Why can't several smaller schools

► *See LAUSD, page 3*

Park Bits

Caltrans has agreed to plant 727 trees in Elysian Park. The planting plan, which was conceived with Recreation and Parks Staff and community input, is intended to mitigate the loss of over 200 mature trees and shrubs that Caltrans destroyed in the 110 Freeway median to accomplish its one-lane southbound 110 freeway widening project. The Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park and the Solano Community Association tried unsuccessfully through lawsuits last year to save the trees from being sacrificed to what we viewed as an ineffective widening project. Caltrans' planting, which could begin as early as October, calls for mostly 1, 5, and 15 gallon native trees that will be clustered in eight different areas in the park.

The Department of Sanitation has begun work on Bishop Canyon Phase II. The \$2.2 million improvements to the former landfill are due to be complete by spring of 2001 and will include picnic and playground areas, a restroom and connecting roadway around the perimeter. Phase I completed several years ago built a baseball and Little League field.

The Australian Lerp Psyllid continues to ravage Elysian Park's Blue Gum Eucalyptus. The tiny insect which made its way across the seas about 2 years ago without bringing along a predator, has defoliated or killed thousands of Eucalyptus trees from San Francisco to San Diego.

Dr. Donald Dalston, Dean of Botany at U.C. Berkeley, is in charge of the state-wide eradication program which is currently breeding predator wasps in captivity. There have been several releases in the area – the closest being the L.A. Zoo, but it is too early to determine what positive effects, if any, the wasps will have.

LASUD, cont'd from page 2

be built? Why can't current schools be earthquake-proofed and additional floors be added? Why doesn't LAUSD build more magnet schools – they are by far the most popular schools, and busing is a given for most who attend?

Since former Colorado Governor Roy Romer signed on the job of LAUD Superintendent of Schools in July, Miller, who appeared to wield considerable power over the Board, has retired. There are no plans to fill the vacancy. Romer has pledged to hire new consultants to conduct yet additional meetings in the community. ◀

Park Rangers, cont'd from page 2

patrolling small neighborhood parks versus large regional ones. The rangers know the nooks and crannies of the larger parks; LAPD officers do not. Every one of the several rangers present expressed the sentiment that there is a current MOA with LAPD that is working just fine; and "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." ▶ See *Park Rangers*, page 4

CCSEP MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip Code _____

Phone: _____

New Member \$10 (Students and Seniors, \$5)

Renewal \$10 (Students and Seniors, \$5)

Donation (no limit) \$ _____

I'd like to help

I'm interested in the following: _____

I have these skills to contribute: _____

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CCSEP meets the 1st Wednesday
of the month, 7:30 P.M.
Call for location.

Send inquiries and letters to:

CCSEP
1501 Cerro Gordo St.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
(323) 666-9651, 225-4025
FAX: (323) 666-9651
www.echopark.net

President: Sallie W. Neubauer
Secretary: Pamela Burgess
Treasurer: Michael Kogan

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Park Ranger, cont'd from page 3

Commission President and Mayoral candidate Steve Soboroff in the end asked staff for more information. Specifically, why the rangers/LAPD shouldn't just continue operating the way they are and report back the results in 6 months. Also, he requested that staff illustrate how changing from the old MOA to the new MOA

will make parks safer. When this proposal comes back to the table staff will also have broken the park system into 2 classifications (with Elysian and Griffith in a larger category) and have specific recommendations for proposed new, less official looking ranger uniforms.

While the CCSEP concedes this is not a "yes" vote for adopting

the new MOA, it also is not denying it. We urge our members to write your Council person, Commission President Steve Soboroff and Recreation and Parks General Manager Ellen Oppenheim to voice your opposition to this potentially catastrophic proposal. What is needed is more rangers and the budget to hire them. <

Your Voice Can Make A Difference

Write your opposition to mountain bikes on our city parks and rails and stripping Park Rangers of law enforcement to:

Steve Soboroff, President
Recreation and Parks Commission
City Hall East, Room 1340
200 N. Main St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Ellen Oppenheim, General Mgr.
Dept. of Recreation and Parks
City Hall East, 13th floor
200 N. Main St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Write your opposition to a high school on the Dodgers parking lot or Barlow Hospital property to:

Roy Romer
LAUSD Superintendent of Schools
450 N. Grand, Room A223
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Send copies of all your letters to your councilperson at:

City Hall East
200 N. Main St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012



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Los Angeles, CA 90026

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TO SAVE ELYSIAN PARK
