

# HOOD

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1999

## Golden Gate Park skating-rink idea nixed

### Haight residents infuriated by proposal

By Sonia Mansfield  
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

San Francisco Recreation and Park Department plans for a skating rink in the east end of Golden Gate Park fell flat after a meeting that saw the idea blasted by harsh criticism from community members and neighborhood activists.

Rec and Park representatives say that the skating rink was just an idea still in its early stages, and that they have since removed the proposal from Golden Gate Park renovation plans. However, neighborhood activists say that with the rink proposal coming after three other community meetings about renovation plans, in which park advocates argued to preserve open space in the east end of Golden Gate Park, it looks like the department is just not listening to the community.

"At the first two meetings we gave input on what we wanted to do in the east end of the park, which was mainly preserve the open space. But then, in this last meeting, Rec and Park dropped this map on us, with a skating rink on it, and we were like, 'Where the heck did this come from?'" said James Beck, vice-president of the Haight Ashbury Neighborhood Council. "This isn't what we had been advocating for. Don't the public's comments mean anything?"

Becky Ballinger, public information officer for the Recreation and Park Department, said residents' opinions were heard loud and clear in the community meetings, and the skating rink plans have been scrapped.

"The people have said that they are opposed to the skating rink, so

that's not in the plan anymore. It was just an idea to get people thinking about what they wanted in the park," said Ballinger. "That plan was resoundingly rejected by the public, and that's fine."

According to Ballinger, as part of an overall plan to renovate the east end of Golden Gate Park, park planners had proposed placing a skating rink directly across from McLaren Lodge in Stanyan Meadow, for ice-skating in the winter and for in-line skating the rest of the year.

Even though the public has shot down the skating-rink idea, it doesn't spell the end of skating in Golden Gate Park. In addition to the weekly Sunday closure of a portion of John F. Kennedy Drive for recreational use, Waller Street will be permanently closed to vehicle traffic from Stanyan Street to Kezar Drive, said Ballinger.

#### The Friends connection

Despite the fact that park officials have dropped the skating-rink plans, some neighborhood activists who attended the community meetings still want to know where the idea for a skating rink came from. There are a number who suspect that the skating-rink idea came from the park-advocacy group Friends of Recreation and Park, and think the group is pushing its ideas — not the community's — on the Recreation and Park Department.

However, Mike Nicolson, project manager and outreach coordinator for Friends of Recreation and Park, said the skating-rink idea did not come from his organization.

Ballinger said the idea for a skating rink has been floating around the department for several years, as a way to decrease illegal activities that have plagued the east end of the park, such as drug dealing,

See SKATING RINK, page 6C

S.F. Independent 10-26-99 p. 1C

# SKATING RINK: Idea nixed

*continued from page 1C*

public intoxication, and illegal homeless encampments.

"We have always talked about increasing positive activities in the east end of the park," said Ballinger. "People are a lot less likely to perform illegal activities if a bunch of people are around."

Greg Gaar of the Alliance for Golden Gate Park said that increasing police patrols in the area, not laying concrete over what little open space San Francisco has, is the way to deal with illegal activities in the park.

"I think the reason this whole ice-rink thing came up is because of the homeless and drug dealers that hang out there," said Gaar. "But we shouldn't have to pave over our parks in order to solve social problems."

As for the remainder of the plans for the east end of Golden Gate Park, nothing is set in concrete.

Ballinger said the conceptual plan shown at the most recent community meeting — minus the skating rink — will be submitted to the Planning Department's

Office of Environmental Review.

The skating rink was the only idea that drew criticism at that meeting, she said.

The proposed plan includes a concrete semicircle east of Alvord Lake for small gatherings such as poetry readings; a rustic seating area in the southeast corner of Stanyan Meadow; and a pathway with a low stone wall.

If the review shows no serious environmental impacts to the park, then the plan will go before the Recreation and Park Commission. At that stage residents may still address any concerns they have, or bring up new ideas for the east end of Golden Gate Park. ■