What's Happening
TRI-CITY VOICE
Fremont, Newark, Union City & Castro Valley, Hayward,
Milpitas, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Sunol
"Accurate, Fair & Honest"
Scan for our FREE App or
Search App Store for TCVnews
510-494-1999 tricityvoice@aol.com www.tricityvoice.com

November 8, 2016

Letter to the Editor: Access for all

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) has operated parks in Contra Costa and Alameda counties since 1934. Its stated mission is to facilitate public access to parks. The district procured 1,200-acres for Vargas Plateau Regional Park, and developed it over 22 years for $8 million. After numerous delays the park opened in May 2016. But, a preliminary injunction closed the park suddenly two months later. The court found that the district failed to widen the Vargas access road, as required by a 2012 settlement agreement. The litigants are preparing for trial, instead of reopening the park.

The closure is unprecedented in the district's 80-year history. In response, a local community group, Mission Peak Conservancy, assembled residents, elected politicians, and representatives from both sides of the litigation in September to discuss avenues to reopen the park. The participants, including one of the plaintiffs and EBRPD Board Director Dennis Waespi, agreed to support reopening for bikes, pedestrians and equestrians pending completion of the road improvements or a negotiated settlement. Both sides of the litigation expressed their desire to work together to reopen the park. The Director of Public Works for the city of Fremont stated that he would consider road improvements, in support of and in cooperation with EBRPD.

However, the General Manager of the park district, Robert Doyle, issued a policy statement with a mantra of "access for all" in response to the community meeting. He said reopening the park for "local" pedestrians and cyclists would be "contrary to the court order [and] contrary to public policy as we serve the entire public not just the neighbors." Meanwhile, EBRPD cut operating hours at Mission Peak by one third in 2014; EBRPD police handed out over 1,300 citations compared to a combined total of 400 at three other regional parks; and funded parking restrictions that eliminated 90 percent of the public parking on weekends. As a result, the district's trail counters show 60,000 fewer visitors annually since 2014, while Vargas Plateau remains padlocked. The district supports access for some (the wealthy) at Mission Peak, and access for none at Vargas Plateau. EBRPD is diverting operating funds to restrict curbside parking near Mission Peak, and funds to litigate rather than operate Vargas Plateau. Contrary to its own policy, the district is limiting park access for residents of southern Alameda County.

Mission Peak Conservancy was founded to represent park visitors. We believe that reopening Vargas Plateau benefits everyone, and is in keeping with the park district's policies. We oppose extending the litigation, while prioritizing park access for the wealthy Mission Peak community over the rest of the public. You can speak out at a meeting of the EBRPD board or the EBRPD City of Fremont liaison committee. Tell them that we not only expect functioning, well-maintained parks; we also pay taxes and vote on bond measures and political candidates.

William Yragui
Co-founder, Mission Peak Conservancy