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Hours of operation and parking restrictions have negative impact

East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) recently published an Òindependent and scientificÓ study of the economic value of parks. They looked at the spending by visitors, the appreciation of housing value near parks and the health benefits of exercise. EBRPD acts as a steward of public parks and open space preserves. Supported by property taxes, bonds and park fees, they also buy land and fund publicity campaigns.

The district operates several parks in Fremont: Ardenwood, Coyote Hills, Quarry Lakes, (Vargas Plateau), Mission Peak, and the Alameda Creek Trail. Nearby are Garin, Dry Creek, Pleasanton Ridge, and the Sunol Wilderness. We benefit from these parks, except for Vargas Plateau which was closed after a lawsuit was filed by local property owners.

The economic study finds that annual visits increased by 78% and recreational value by 97% since 2000. Population grew only 13%, so the study finds a Òsoaring interest in, and commitment to, better health.Ó The study quantifies Òas much as possible, the impact of the District on the quality of life that virtually all East Bay residents enjoyÉ.ÓÊ Mission Peak Conservancy was created in 2014, after EBRPD cut park hours at Mission Peak Regional Preserve by 33% with little notice. Residents nearby complained of too many visitors, sullying their neighborhood. EBRPD launched a coordinated PR campaign that targeted visitors to the park. In 2014, they stepped up curfew enforcement actions and handed out hundreds of curfew violation tickets. The neighbors were not satisfied and continued to protest. The park district and city of Fremont worked to create a weekend restricted parking program which was implemented In 2016 and EBRPD paid $28,000 towards administrative costs.

The reduced hours and restricted parking are harming visitors, who are the guests of the park district and city. First, public records from EBRPD and the city of Fremont show that over 748 parking citations were issued since November 2016, costing visitors more than $48,000. The average ticket is $62. Offenses include parking more than 18 inches from the curb, expired registrations tags, parking near driveways, and permit violations. However, the permit-parking signs are difficult to comprehend, and the volume of tickets was increasing all the way through early March 2017 (the most recent data period). The visitor count has dropped precipitously since April 2016, by 41% year over year, or 5,000 visits a month at the Stanford Avenue entrance.

The EBRPD economic study indicates that visitor utility is $8 per visit. They define utility as the value an individual places on a visit to a park. A decrease of 5,000 visitors each month represents a loss of $40,000 per month or half a million dollars per year. The actual impact is greater, since only 17% of the citations go to Fremont residents. Visitors who drive farther have a greater propensity to spend at local restaurants. When access is blocked, they take their money elsewhere.
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As stated in the economic analysis: ÒThe importance of recreational opportunity to healthful living and productivity has become a national dialogue. In addition, the economic value of ecosystem services and green infrastructure is increasingly a focus of public policymakers.ÓÊ

Gated communities surround Mission Peak, and parking on public streets is restricted. Residents of the gated community filed a lawsuit in November, to block EBRPD from building a new parking lot. We believe that the parking restrictions and lawsuits negatively impact the quality of life in our city and our local business establishments. EBRPD objectives must be focused to preserve economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity.

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