

Mitchell Park is the most important urban open space in San Luis Obispo, after Mission Plaza. It's gratifying to see that there are legions of fierce, articulate guardians of this park from throughout this community, ready to advocate for the integrity of the park, and I count myself among your ranks. We heard from about 30 people tonight on this issue, many of who are these "guardians of Mitchell Park" and I think that for the most part, both sides on this issue acknowledged the legitimacy of the other side's argument.

To me, in politics, the process is as important as the goal. I value consensus, and that quality has surely been lacking in past deliberations on this matter. Most people who are active on this issue – and I've heard from a lot of people writing to me before this evening – expect me to supply the critical third vote to "win" this issue for their side. I've had dozens of e-mails, I have held two "sidewalk office hours" meetings on the site, and I have spent long hours into the night trying to collect enough information to know how best to proceed.

So let me assert my position as it now stands. I'd like to state a number of assumptions and then a series of proposals.

ASSUMPTIONS

Assumption #1: The Senior Center's use of the Senior Center is a vital part of this community and a legitimate use of Mitchell Park and the historic Kindergarten building. It is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Many previous attempts to move the seniors from this building have been tried and failed: It is now being remodeled, it is in a convenient location well-served by transit, and the seniors deserve support and recognition for 36 years of devoted, consistent, and effective volunteer service to this City. We're not talking about a "marginal" contractor like Stevie Mac – this is not a street gang – the facility is not a homeless shelter – these are, after all, senior citizens and they would be (and should be) welcomed into almost any neighborhood. I've heard some complaints about the amount of traffic that they bring to the neighborhood, but there are no grounds for believing that they are disruptive. It is also clear that our current fiscal realities make it virtually impossible to envision that the Senior Center will be relocated to a new facility anytime within the next ten to fifteen years.

Assumption #2: There is a critical need for off-street wheelchair parking stalls for the Center in order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The current parking with a blue-painted curb does not meet contemporary ADA standards, and would not be permitted if proposed today. The needs of those with disabilities and mobility impairments (short of full disability needed for a DMV disabled-parking sticker) are not met by curb parking or by either of the transit options (bus or dial-a-ride) for many of the Senior Center population.

Assumption #3: Much of the existing "backyard" of the Senior Center is already paved - about 1/3 of the 6,000 s.f. envelope consists now of shuffleboard court concrete and horseshoe pits. The turf area that would be paved for parking is physically and visually separate from the main park square.

Assumption #4: There is a continuing and growing need for a new community garden plot; suitable sites for this type of facility are few – the Gearhart property on Calle Joaquin, for example, would not meet the needs of downtown residents. Mitchell Park is one site that might be suitable. In my view, the 3-2 decision by the previous Council to amend the Park Master Plan and delete the proposal for a "specialty garden" was unwise, absent a commitment to make up that loss in a new site within the downtown.

Assumption #5: With respect to the original parking lot design, the playground adjacent to the Senior Center presented certain risks of conflict with the proposed exit driveway, although the proposed fence (which Councilman Carter had fought for) mitigated this concern somewhat.

PROPOSALS

The following proposals are offered this evening in a good-faith effort to seek consensus among the Council. Toward that end, I will NOT provide a third vote for either of the following motions:

- Development of the parking lot as proposed; or
- Killing the parking lot project altogether, even if coupled with a motion to make it a major City goal to relocate the Senior Center.

Instead, I will seek a consensus around a compromise proposal that will attract at least 4 votes from the council, and hopefully all five of us. Let's look at how we might do that, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. I myself like the way this alternative design is composed – that it saves the tree, eliminates the problems of the exit on Santa Rosa Street, and reduces the cost to some degree:

Proposal #1: The parking lot configuration as shown in the redesigned plan avoids paving under the dripline of the Heritage Tree (the current lot comes to within 11').

Proposal #2: The new configuration we're seeing tonight could delete the exit drive to Santa Rosa Street and re-design the lot to provide two-way access from Buchon. A "hammerhead" at the north end of the lot is shown, to enable easy turn-around. By deleting the exit, the new design would minimize disruption to the Heritage Tree, avoid potential conflicts with southbound traffic on Santa Rosa when a bus is parked

at the transit stop, reduce possible risks to children using the adjacent playground, and avoid the need to remove one curb parking space on Santa Rosa Street. We tend to under-value such curb parking, and all too often we tend to restrict curb parking, in this case for seniors, which restricts its utility to other park users.

Proposal #3: The proposed new design provides a lot with a much smaller envelope, yet provides nearly the same number of spaces. To the degree that standard stalls are provided, I'd also like the Parks & Recreation Commission and the Senior Center to consider a less restrictive policy that would enable general occupancy after, say 3 or 4 p.m. daily. We might also consider motorcycle stalls to accommodate scooters (or motorcycles!) – but any additional standard stalls would definitely provide indirect benefits to neighborhood and park users by relieving some of the pressure on street parking.

Proposal #4: I would also like to have direct staff tonight to remove the existing pumphouse and associated driveway and curb cut that now occupies a highly visible spot near Buchon Street. This would improve the aesthetics of the park and help contribute to the "no net loss" proposal that is central to my overall concept, as outlined in #5 below.

Proposal #5: As part of the proposal to gain a consensus of opinion, the council should commit to a major city goal of providing a new Community Garden within the greater downtown area, to meet a demonstrated need. I'd like to have us apply any cost saving from this re-designed parking lot to that project, and to the removal of the pumphouse shed (see #4 above). In general, I'd like to see us pursue ideas such as that provided by Eric Meyer, for example, that could restore some of the existing paved area next to the playground, in pursuit of a "no net loss" policy for the "green space" of Mitchell Park.

Those are my proposals, and I'm ready to consider a motion or motions. Thank you.