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County of El Dorado Clerk of the Board <edc.cob@edcgov.us>

7/27/2021 meeting; Agenda Item Not available - Chili Bar Park

1 message

Elena DeLacy <elena@arconservancy.org>
To: "edc.cob@edcgov.us" <edc.cob@edcgov.us>
Cc: Vickie Sanders <vickie.sanders@edcgov.us>

Wed, Jul 21, 2021 at 4:00 PM

LATE DISTRIBUTION
DATE 7/22/2021
BUS 7/29/2021

To Whom It May Concern,

Attached is a comment letter for next week's BOS meeting. I do not know the Agenda Item number as that information has not been made available at this time.

Sincerely,

Elena DeLacy

Elena DeLacy
Executive Director
American River Conservancy
P.O. Box 562 – Coloma, CA 95613
(530) 621-1224
www.ARConservancy.org

A gift to American River Conservancy preserves rivers and land for life.

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AMERICAN RIVER CONSERVANCY

Preserving Rivers and Land for Life

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
John Hidahl, Chair (District I)
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Wendy Thomas (District III)
Lori Parlin (District IV)
Sue Novasel (District V)
330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667

July 20, 2021

Re: Chili Bar Park

Dear Supervisors,

This letter serves as a response to El Dorado County's recent effort to develop a Preliminary Master Plan for Chili Bar Park. I also would like to provide some background information that I believe may help in your evaluation and decision-making process. American River Conservancy is a non-profit land trust that focuses on watershed conservation, education, and stewardship in the Upper American River and Upper Cosumnes River watersheds. American River Conservancy (ARC) has over 25 years of experience managing commercial and public use at Chili Bar Park. In 1994, ARC purchased a conservation easement with State funding on an approximately 4-acre portion of the 16-acre Chili Bar Park property, then owned by Richard and Marianne De Chant. In 1995 ARC made improvements to the park on the lower terrace and opened the site to the public under a special use permit issued by El Dorado County. At that time, fees were collected by the owners, subject to a management agreement between ARC and the owners. The conservation easement, along with the management agreement and special use permit, provided a partnership structure for ARC and the De Chants to cooperatively manage public use and enjoyment of the South Fork American River at Chili Bar Park.

In 2006, Richard and Marianne De Chant notified ARC of their intent to sell the 16-acre Chili Bar Park property, and ARC proceeded to fundraise to acquire the property. In November of 2007, with approval by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, ARC purchased Chili Bar Park with \$1,095,000 in State River Parkways grant program funding and \$65,000 in El Dorado County (river trust) funding. ARC subsequently deeded the property to El Dorado County, subject to the Conservation Easement held by ARC. At that time, ARC agreed to work with El Dorado County to fundraise and assist with the development of a park and campground on the upper terrace of the Chili Bar property, and negotiate a new management agreement to reflect the new ownership and management structure at the site.

It is now 2021, nearly fourteen years after El Dorado County's acquisition of Chili Bar Park. During that time, ARC has continued to actively manage public access and use at the site. In 2016 and 2017, when extensive flooding damaged the lower terrace and park amenities, ARC restored the picnic area, river bank, and associated vegetation. Water for potable use and irrigation was installed and funded by ARC. ARC also works closely with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to enhance the fishery in the

South Fork American River to improve angling opportunities at the park – in 2020 and 2021 there were two fish plants completed. ARC employs permanent and seasonal staff to collect user fees, assist the public, maintain the parking area and lower terrace, and provide a safe and secure day use area.

Sadly, the buildings and infrastructure that exist on the upper terrace at Chili Bar Park are in disrepair. There are no permanent restroom amenities for park users, and ADA access is non-existent. While ARC has attempted to negotiate a new management agreement, submitting a draft agreement for County staff to review and comment on several years ago, there has been no progress made and very little communication to achieve that end. While there has been some progress made with the new Preliminary Master Plan prepared by HELIX Environmental, I do have some comments about the process and some concerns regarding the Plan as presented to the Parks and Trails Commission on June 17, 2021:

- (1) **Improve communication between County staff, Consultants, and ARC.** During the planning process, ARC leadership (Executive Director) was contacted twice by the Consultants. The Park Manager (ARC Staff) was also contacted by HELIX staff. These meetings were essentially information-gathering sessions prior to any public meetings or draft site plans were released. ARC was invited to submit comments and attend public meetings, which we did. However, ARC was not consulted separately following any of the public forums or after site plan alternatives were developed. We feel that the planning process would have benefitted greatly from more focused consultation with ARC leadership about the proposed alternatives.
- (2) **Initial Chili Bar Park improvements should focus on safety, restrooms and ADA accessibility.** The preferred alternative that was recommended by the Parks and Trails Commission on June 17, 2021 would utilize the old retail store building to house restrooms and a changing area. ARC feels that this is not the best use of that space. Locating restrooms in that space would pose a safety hazard to park users who would have to walk across the road from the parking area to use the facilities. Furthermore, repurposing that building for restroom amenities would forego any other type of use of that building in the future. ARC suggests that El Dorado County explore a different site for the restrooms, perhaps utilizing the old concrete building on the upper terrace. Park users would be able to access the restroom more easily from the beach area, and an ADA accessible parking space could be developed adjacent to the new restroom site. Additional ADA accessibility improvements could also be made throughout the Park.
- (3) **Future Park improvements should consider additional uses managed through a concession agreement.** It has been suggested in public forum that there may be an opportunity to work with a concessionaire to operate a store and a high-end campground. An RV campground concession or lease could provide year-round revenue to help manage and maintain the entire park. This revenue would help provide year-round staff presence and contribute to the flood restoration and management fund. A concessionaire would also provide an additional presence overnight and would result in less vandalism at the site. Furthermore, providing overnight camping amenities support tourism to our County and the City of Placerville, which is less than 5 miles from the Park. The store building could operate as a retail space and could support the

concession, park users, and nearby residents. Future planning and concession selection processes should include consultation with ARC.

- (4) **Evaluate the entire 16-acre property holistically.** In this Preliminary Master Plan, only the Upper Terrace portion of the property was evaluated. Trail access and connectivity to adjacent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land is possible, and it is clear in public meetings that there is demand for trail connectivity.

ARC is committed to continuing our partnership with El Dorado County in managing Chili Bar Park, but it is clear that there is room for improvement with regards to communication and collaboration. Investment in park and trail resources in El Dorado County is a worthwhile endeavor, and one that benefits all residents and visitors to our county. On behalf of ARC, I welcome you to visit Chili Bar Park at your leisure, or contact me to further understand why the site is so worthy of further investment and attention. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important resource.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elena DeLacy".

Elena DeLacy
Executive Director

CC: Vickie Sanders, Parks Manager