

## County moving forward with building, improving parks

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### *County moving forward with building, improving three parks*



The rural town of Plainview doesn't have a park or a public open area for children to play, but that will change in the coming months.

Tuesday, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors approved a memorandum of understanding to build a new park in the rural town south of Exeter.

But the cost of building the tiny park — which at just a third of an acre in size could include just half a basketball court, a playground, a small walking trail and some benches — won't actually be paid for with county dollars.

County officials plan to cover the costs of designing and constructing the park with \$100,000 from a \$527,800 state grant earmarked for building new parks or renovating existing parks in underprivileged areas.

The Plainview park project is one of three park projects that will be paid for with the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development's 2013 Housing Related Parks Program Grant.

County officials said that with the remaining grant money, they plan to use \$140,000 of the grant money to improve Peter Malloch Park in Goshen and \$198,000 for improvements to Ledbetter Park in Cutler.

Each of the three park budgets include \$10,000 tacked on to cover unanticipated costs, a common practice for government projects.

The remaining \$89,000 would go to contractors responsible for design, construction and overseeing construction at all three parks along with developing the documents for bidding on the work and estimating the costs for projects. During Tuesday's county Board of Supervisors meeting, the supervisors also approved a memorandum of understanding — essentially a contract — to construct improvements at Peter Malloch Park, which is owned and operated by the Goshen Community Services District.

The Plainview Park also will not be a county-owned park, but rather it will be built on land owned by the Plainview Mutual Water Company. The utility also would agree to maintain the new park — including gardening and equipment repairs — once it's built, said Eric Coyne, the county's film commissioner and tourism manager.

Such a memorandum isn't needed to improve Ledbetter Park, as it is county owned.

Coyne said the grant money is part of a state reward program for communities that work to develop affordable housing, and jurisdictions are awarded points based on the amount of affordable housing developed in their areas.

In Tulare County's case, those points added to \$527,800 in grant money that could be used for park building and improvements in disadvantaged areas.

In the case of Ledbetter Park, the planned improvements will not involve replacing playground equipment or picnic gazebos. Instead, county officials plan to replace its aging irrigation system to work more efficiently and use less.

Initial estimates are that the Ledbetter irrigation improvements — which could include a computerized control system that would work with moisture sensors in the ground — may cut water use there by 30 to 40 percent.

But leaks and other problems often found in old irrigation systems could save considerably more water once they're fixed replaced, said Tyson Carroll a landscape architect and landscape contractor for the Urban Tree Foundation in Visalia, contracted to be the design and project manager on the three park projects.

Both Carroll and Coyne said all the money earmarked for Ledbetter — southwest of Highway 63 and Kamm Avenue — likely will be used just on irrigation work.

Coyne said the county wasn't looking to build a new county-run park because the county couldn't afford the costs of operating it once it's built.

But officials at the Plainview Mutual Water District had talked for years building a park for children, and the organization was willing to maintain it.

A provision of the grant is that the water district will operate the park for a minimum of 15 years, Coyne noted. Plans are to build it on a third-of-an-acre parcel on the southeast edge of Plainview, off Road 198 and Avenue 194.

Currently, a road runs through the middle of that site, and the county plans to extend the road around the park site.

As for what the Plainview park will feature, Carroll said that in the initial meeting with residents, they wanted a soccer field, which would have been longer than the space available.

Even a full-size basketball court was too big, so residents whittled down their wish list, and current, proposed plans call for a half basketball court, along with a playground, a gravel walking trail, some benches and some drought-resistant trees.

Children in the community may have fared a little better in getting their wishes, as they were shown photos of playgrounds and asked "what do you want to play on most," Carroll said.

One thing the park will not have is grass, a decision based partly on the Valley's current drought problems, along with the lack of space for any grassy play areas and a desire to reduce park maintenance, he explained.

Instead, unused space will be covered with bark, though a final plan of what the Plainview park will offer and look like hasn't been approved, Carroll said.

Similarly, Carroll is working on a plan for improvements to Peter Malloch Park based on what community members said they want and the money available to do it.

Visalia-based Self-Help Enterprises built the nine-acre park back in 2013 as part of its development of affordable apartments and single-family homes on 40 acres in Goshen, and that housing surrounds much of the park northeast of East Avenue 310 and North Road 72.

It features a couple of soccer fields, a playground and a gazebo that covers a picnic area beneath it.

Carroll said Self-Help ended up paying for the park after failing to obtain grants to build it, so only 70 to 80 percent of the features the developers wanted were built, with a plan to build out more once additional funding became available.

With the county putting up a portion of the state grant money, community meetings have been held to determine a "wish list" of park improvements, which have includes expanding the existing playground to add features for older children and building shade structures near the playground so parents can watch their children play in cooler conditions.

And if any money is left, plans are to add benches, barbecues and trash receptacles, said Carroll, who noted that the Goshen park gets a lot of use, particularly on evenings and weekends.

"There's still a few wish list items, but those are down the road," when more funding becomes available, he said.

Tom Collishaw, president and chief executive officer of Self-Help, said the Goshen park was designed with room for a basketball court and hopes it will eventually be built, though his organization isn't involved in planning what to do with the grant money available to the county.

"We were thrilled that the Housing Related Parks Program along," he said, noting that much of the reason Tulare County is getting the incentive grant for parks stems from the amount of affordable housing Self-Help developed in Goshen.

**"So we thought it was great a chunk of that money would go into Goshen to improve that park," Collishaw said.**

Juan Castro, who lives in the Park Village development next to Peter Malloch Park and was there Tuesday morning playing soccer with his children, has his own wish list.

"Last night, I was walking with the wife and kids. We need lights. It was so dark, I couldn't see out there" into the park, he said.

Coyne said county staff hopes to get final proposed plans for the parks to the Board of Supervisors within 60 days for approval.

While he wouldn't speculate on when the improvements and construction may begin, he said that under the rules of the grant, the county would have to finish the work and submit all invoices to have the state pay for the work by April 30 of next year.

### **Special meeting**

What: Tulare County Board of Supervisors and the Tulare County Employees Retirement Association joint meeting

When: 8:30 a.m. Wednesday

Where: TCERA board chambers, 136 N. Akers Street, Visalia.

Get the agenda: Go to [www.tularecounty.ca.gov/board](http://www.tularecounty.ca.gov/board), click on "Agenda Packets," then the meeting date.