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## Residents say leave lights off

### El Dorado Hills OKs lighted playing fields in a new community park despite outcry.

**By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer**

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The El Dorado Hills Community Services District sought to end debate over nighttime use of athletic fields, approving a plan that calls for lighted playing fields in a new community park.

If all proceeds according to the district's timetable, the first phase of the project would go to bid next summer, with completion anticipated in April 2006.

But residents near the Promontory Community Park site who oppose lights and the nighttime activities they foster say they aren't ready to concede.

Bill Majernik, a spokesman for the group, said the district board's decision leaves nearby homeowners no recourse but to file a lawsuit.

The board voted 3-0 on Nov. 18 to proceed with the master plan despite a last-minute plea from Tony Zogopoulos, a member of the development team for the Promontory community, expected to consist of approximately 1,100 homes at build-out.

He said the developers had remained silent while neighborhood residents and representatives of athletic groups sought to come up with a mutually satisfactory park design.

"We do not support the park as presently planned," Zogopoulos said.

He urged the board to postpone adopting the master plan and continue discussions, saying that he and his associates would be willing to accelerate park construction in the Carson Creek and Valley View developments south of Highway 50 to help meet the demand for lighted playing fields.

Zogopoulos said developers would consider constructing parks in those neighborhoods before homes are built to avoid the kind of conflict that has surrounded the Promontory Park project.

Board members were not inclined to wait. Reading prepared statements before taking a vote, each of the three directors present argued that more playing fields are urgently needed.

Staff members and sports group representatives cited statistics showing that El Dorado Hills' athletic facilities are not keeping pace with growth. According to district standards that call for one small soccer field per 2,000 residents, El Dorado Hills should have 15 fields. It has five. Likewise, the community should have 15 tennis courts but has only four.

Rob Vomund said he and fellow tennis players must go to Folsom to find adequate facilities. As a

result, he said, El Dorado Hills residents outnumber Folsom residents on Folsom teams.

Promontory resident Darin White, who opposes lights at the park, said he used to live in Folsom and was involved in athletics in the city. But, he said, "I'm against 'Folsomization' of El Dorado Hills. We want a different community here."

Others maintained during the Nov. 18 hearing that Promontory residents don't speak for the rest of the community. With a population of 30,000, they said, El Dorado Hills must acknowledge the demand for urban amenities.

The master plan approved by the board calls for two lighted softball-baseball diamonds, a lighted soccer field with artificial turf, two lighted tennis courts, two bocce ball courts, horseshoe pits and two lighted basketball courts. The park will include a 3,000-square-foot community center, children's play area and a water play area with a fountain and ground jets.

The construction cost, to be funded by fees paid by developers, is estimated at \$6 million.

Saying that he moved to the area when it was home to only 3,000 people, board member Larry Brilliant asked the community to "work together to avoid a potential tragedy." The tragedy, he said, would be having to turn children away from athletic leagues and recreational activities because there is no place for them to play.

Board President Joe Chinn recounted his experience playing baseball as a youth in the Midwest. At the end of one season, his struggling team got a chance to play on a field with top-notch turf and lights. When the lights came on, he said, "We felt like All-Stars. We played the most incredible baseball we ever did."

Without lighted fields, Chinn said, the district will never have enough turf to meet demands. "We need to look at the whole community and its needs," he said.

Director Justin Masters said he had visited the Play Fields Park in Davis, which has lights similar to those contemplated by the El Dorado Hills district, and he talked with residents of a neighborhood next to the park. "They felt it was an asset to the community," he said.

Promontory residents also paid a nighttime visit to Play Fields Park, and they presented a video illustrating their concerns about game-time noise and glare. One segment featured the roar of a motorcycle revving up in the parking lot.

White contrasted Play Fields' location with El Dorado Hills' planned community park site off Sophia Parkway and Alexandra Way. "It's next to Interstate 80, which is exactly where a park like this belongs," he said of the Davis complex.

Although the El Dorado Hills park will be bordered by apartments and commercial development, the site is across the street from single-family homes.

Opponents of lighted fields at the park argue that the proposed design is contrary to the Promontory Specific Plan that governs development of 999 acres in the northwest part of the community just east of Folsom. The initial plan approved by the county Board of Supervisors in 1997 called for 18 acres of parkland, including a 10-acre community park at the "village center."

Through a land swap, however, a 4-acre park site near the Promontory Elementary School, now under construction, was eliminated, and the acreage was added to the village center site to create 14 acres zoned as parkland and 4 acres of open space.

Promontory residents argue that the changes have transformed what was intended as a low-impact park into a sports complex.

They also question whether the district's plan to build the parking lot for the facility within a 300-foot-wide power line easement, in the area designated as open space, complies with terms of a settlement agreement between the developer and the environmental group El Dorado Taxpayers for Quality Growth.

District staff members said the parking lot complies with the agreement. But they advised the board to approve the master plan without a proposed dog park, pending word from the county on whether the use is allowed in an open-space area.

### **About the writer:**

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