



Bass Lake resident challenges assessment

BY MIKE ROBERTS
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Bass Lake Action Committee President John Thomson has challenged the El Dorado Hills Community Services District's Landscape and Lighting Assessment District (LLAD) for Bass Lake Village Zone B, which funds the maintenance of troubled Oak Knoll Park.

In an open letter to the community services district, Thomson claims the little-used boulder and oak studded 2.6-acre park was specifically excluded in the LLAD formation documents, and demands the funds collected for its maintenance be refunded.

The community services district is in the midst of planning a makeover of the park, which serves two separate developments within Bass Lake Village, each with its own LLAD.

The older Zone A was instituted in 1995 with an annual \$99 assessment on the 278 homes in the Hills of El Dorado development to fund maintenance of landscaping on Magnolia Hills Drive and fifteen streetlights.

After the adjacent 294-home Woodridge development was annexed into Bass Lake Village in 1999, Zone B was formed with an initial \$274.84 annual fee which was intended to cover maintenance of a village park. An initial park location on Summer Drive in Woodridge was rejected by the CSD. The assessment funded maintenance of Oak Knoll Park, located on Alyssum Circle in the Hills of El Dorado.

The park, which has restrooms, parking, a small pool, a clubhouse and a playground area, benefits residents in both zones of Bass Lake Village, according to the most recent engineers report.

But park usage has decreased in recent years as the Bass Lake Village demographic has aged. The park now attracts less families with young children during the day and more teenagers after school. Graffiti has become a problem. Last summer Oak Knoll was the most vandalized park in El Dorado Hills, according to CSD General Manager Wayne Lowery. Many residents claim they never use the park, and resent paying an assessment to maintain it.



Recognizing both the problems and potential of Oak Knoll Park, CSD Planning Director Dianna Hillyer championed the park makeover, and held two park planning workshops with residents in 2008.

In the post-Proposition 13 funding environment, LLADs have become the preferred vehicle to fund park maintenance in California cities and special districts. Their usage is evolving. Recent legislation now prohibits cities and special districts from creating LLADs for preexisting parks.

El Dorado Hills neighborhoods differ widely on how their park maintenance is funded. New parks require an LLAD. Older parks are maintained from the CSD general fund. Assessments in some initial LLADs were set too low. Inequities abound.

In 2008 eight of the district's 22 LLADs were subsidized by the CSD's general fund, at a total cost of \$177,000.

Thomson contends in his letter that the initial \$274.84 annual assessment for Zone B was set arbitrarily in 1999. His concern piqued when the assessment increased to \$299 in 2008, despite an apparent \$200,000 surplus in the operating fund.

After researching the formation document for both Bass Lake Village assessment districts, Thomson concluded that maintenance of Oak Knoll Park was never mentioned, and that the CSD has over assessed the Bass Lake LLAD Zone B.

Thomson wants all expenditure of LLAD funds on the park stopped, and a new engineer's report to confirm the benefit and corresponding assessment for Zone B.

He also demanded the refund of any excess money collected from residents in Zone B.

During a Jan. 6 meeting with Bass Lake Village residents, CSD Finance Director Allison Hamaker explained the disparity in the two Bass Lake Village assessments. Zone A's assessment didn't include a park maintenance component because it was created before LLADs were allowed to include park maintenance.

It was never revisited, she said, because the cost of an election would be prohibitive for only 278 homes. Also, she explained, "Until we get the park fixed, the residents would likely vote it down."

Hamaker later told Village Life, "We're taking their letter seriously and if the district finds there's been a mistake then we'll fix it."



Reached by phone, Lowery said he supported Hamaker's position, and followed with an e-mail stating, "Mr. Thompson has raised several concerns, some of which may have legitimacy. Until we've completed a review of our records on the formation and management of the Bass Lake assessment districts, we can neither deny nor substantiate their validity."

CSD officials met with the district's tax engineer and attorney on Monday, but had no additional statements at press time. Thomson's most recent "Bass Lake Bulletin" contains more information about the Bass Lake Village LLAD dispute, <http://www.basslakeaction.org>.

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