

## New parks plan in the works, winter homeless shelter approved

### WATSONVILLE

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**WATSONVILLE** >> Watsonville is setting out to refresh plans for the future of the city's 26 parks, replacing plans that have largely lain dormant in the wake of the Great Recession.

More than a third of Watsonville's residents are younger than the age of 18, and demand for improved fields and other park amenities is high. But with funding scarce, little progress has been made toward highly sought-after renovations such as adding night lights to the soccer fields at the city's Ramsay Park.

Now, city staff is hoping to renew community consensus and create "shovel-ready" plans that are more likely to secure state funding — most notably, the state's \$4 billion water and parks bond approved by voters in June.

The effort will take the form of a strategic

plan, which will guide parks development for the next five years. Originating in the private sector, strategic plans are increasingly in vogue among local governments looking to better bridge community vision with actionable goals.

"This will really allow us to plan forward and realize the full potential for park spaces," said Nick Calubaquib, Watsonville's Director of Parks and Community Services on Tuesday, as he provided an update on the plans to the Watsonville City Council.

Two parks in particular will receive special focus, according to Calubaquib: Ramsay Park and the City Plaza, renovations to which have long been on the community's wish list.

The 26-acre Ramsay Park, on Main Street, is seen as the city's primary park destination. Amenities include a skate park, soccer fields, tennis courts, a nature center and a family center.

But plans to renovate the park's popular soccer fields with night lights and artificial grass have stalled for years due to lack of funding, frustrating some city leaders.

"Those soccer fields, we've been talking about them since even probably before I came to office — probably 2011," said Felipe Hernandez. "I remember at one point it was \$1.6 million that was the estimated cost, and it just went up and up and up."

Cost estimates for the renovations are now upward of \$3.2 million, according to Calubaquib — more than double the parks department's on-hand development funds.

Consultants are expected to be selected to help develop the strategic plan in December, according to Calubaquib, and the parks department plans to turn to the community for input in January.

A finalized plan is expected in the fall of 2019.

### Winter shelter approved

In other business, the Watsonville City Council approved a contract on Tuesday with the

Salvation Army to reopen the South County winter homeless shelter on Grant Street.

The 38-bed winter shelter will remain open through April 15. It includes expanded day-center services that allow access to showers, laundry, mail, internet and social services during the day.

Santa Cruz County's homeless services coordinator.

Tamara Vides, Watsonville's deputy city manager, said last year's high demand for the shelter shows the model is working.

"What's unique about it is it is a low-barrier shelter, so there's no

services are available."

Funding for the shelter is split between Watsonville, which pays \$45,805, and Santa Cruz County, which pays \$57,779, subsidized by the Salvation Army.

An additional 60-bed winter shelter opened in Live Oak Nov. 15.

The Salvation Army's Watsonville shelter reopened last winter after a hiatus since 2012, and its beds were filled every night, according to Rayne Marr,

conditions attached for you to access a safe, dry place to sleep at night," Vides said. "You don't have to enroll in a program or participate in any activity. If you need the services, the