

Date: January 5, 2017

To: Senior Commission Members

CC: Manny Hernandez, Jaime Chew, and Cheri Anderson

From: Gary Anderson, Tracie Murray, and Bert Vincent

Subject: Revised Recommendations regarding the Senior Program at Grant Park

Over the past three months, our Senior Commission subcommittee concerned with the programs for seniors at Grant Park and Hillview has been focusing on the near-term status of the program at Grant Park as it is currently being managed by the Recreation and Community Services Department and the Grant Park volunteers.

One of our members, Bert Vincent, has been active in the Grant Park programs for most of the past two years, and Tracie and I have visited both the Monday and Wednesday activities on many occasions. We have also had a number of discussions with R&CS staff members Manny Hernandez, Jaime Chew, and Cheri Anderson, had informal contact with members of the previous senior commissions and the Parks & Recreation Commission, and had numerous conversations with volunteers and participants in the program.

We have been very impressed with the quality and diversity of the programs that have been developed by Grant Park volunteers with the assistance of Cheri and her predecessor Candace Avina in the R&CS. Wednesdays attract an average of about 60 participants every week, about the same as use Hillview on a daily basis, many walking to the center. Volunteers have organized two exercise sessions, a language class, several tables of bridge, frequent speaker programs and a greatly appreciated meal service that includes a combination of catered meals and potluck weeks managed by the volunteers under staff supervision. Many Grant Park members mention this lunch as the high point of their week.

The Monday programs, added in 2016, are being well received and participation is increasing, with 20-30 seniors on average taking advantage of a discussion group, a language practice session, and informal tables of bridge, with participants bringing snacks to supplement the department coffee service.

In the course of that work, we've observed, suggested and encouraged a number of changes that the R&CS has made led by Cheri as the new Senior Programs Supervisor. In particular, she has been working with the volunteers at Grant Park to make sure that all of them are properly registered as City of Los Altos volunteers. In addition, she has reviewed the background and qualifications of the individuals who are teaching classes, all on a volunteer basis, and gotten them formal status as contractors to the city in the classes they are teaching or leading. As a consequence of this work, the Grant Park senior program activities are consistent with City policies to cover out-of-pocket costs on activities, as is the case at Hillview where some activities are free and some have a related charge, though right now all activities at Grant Park are still free to participants. Beginning this month, meal charges at both centers are on a "suggested donation requested but not required" basis.

We believe that the City should continue to support the Grant Park senior activities and expand the days that the center is open, subject to availability of staff and demand, since the program is a great fit to the size of the facilities and the characteristics of the neighborhood.

**Recommendations** To facilitate maintenance of the momentum established by the senior program volunteers at Grant Park we are making the following five recommendations:

**Bring the Grant Park facility up to date as soon as possible**

As noted in the facilities survey in 2016, The Grant Park buildings are sound and the layout with a multipurpose building and four classrooms is appropriate for current uses. We have been informed that R&CS plans to improve the physical multipurpose building facilities and recommend that this work be completed as soon as possible. Plans include a new flooring system suitable for exercise, athletic and dance use, and upgraded bathrooms. To support the range of activities the buildings can support, we also recommend that a small commercial-grade kitchen should be installed, as well as upgraded electrical, audio/visual and internet capabilities. If this is accomplished, not only will the senior program benefit, but the other programs that use that facility would also benefit. In addition, if the Hillview project goes forward, the Grant Park facilities would be more suitable to handle some of the Hillview activities on an interim basis.

**Create a permanent Senior Lounge in one of the current classrooms**

The senior lounge within the multipurpose building that was created two years ago is a pleasant space, but it is only available on Wednesdays when other Senior Program activities are using the multipurpose room. We support R&CS plans to set aside Classroom 4 for use as a senior lounge on a permanent basis as soon as the part-time commercial pre-school program vacates that space. We also recommend that the Senior Program be given priority for use of the contiguous classroom, similar to the layout at Hillview, so that classes and discussion groups can be held in the adjoining room while the lounge is used for quieter activities.

**Add a program coordinator to R&CS staff to manage Grant Park activities**

With the Grant Park Program now serving nearly as many seniors in the southern part of the city on days when it is open as the Hillview program serves, we strongly support proposed plans for the addition of a staff member to coordinate activities, maintain communications with volunteers, and plan activities for Senior Program members at the Grant Park facilities. With expanded access to facilities and coordination of activities, we believe the Grant Park program can continue to expand in days and activities, serving the large number of seniors who live near this neighborhood-oriented venue.

**Involve Grant Park volunteers and participants in planning**

As work goes forward to improve the Grant Park facilities and expand the programs, we strongly recommend that the Grant Park volunteers, instructors and class leaders, and program participants be involved in the planning. Active involvement by those who use the center on a weekly basis, many with relevant experience, would help assure that the facilities actually address real needs in a meaningful way. That would also give the participants and leaders a feeling of ownership in the facilities and programs, continuing recent progress towards integration of the Grant Park activities into the overall Los Altos Senior Program.