

News from the Helotes Heritage Association

Dear Readers,

Helotes is at a crossroads in developing its first parks. HHA strongly supports the development of these parks. Following is a letter to the editor as it was recently submitted to the Echo.

Sincerely,
Ron Green
HHA, President

Parks are the Crown Jewels of a Community

Helotes was settled in the 19th century and incorporated in 1981. The city remained small with a population of less than a few thousand until recently. A short trip through the neighboring areas drives home the reality that development is rapidly taking over NW Bexar County, including Helotes. Within the very near future, the entire area will be claimed by housing developments, commercial enterprises, roads, and schools. Once development and zoning are set in place, change will not come easily.

Similar to many small communities, Helotes did not take the steps necessary to set aside lands for parks and playgrounds. If kids want to play in a field or on a playset, they have to use church facilities, because the closest public playground is O.P. Schnabel park is located about 5 miles away.

Recently, the Helotes City Council and the Parks and Open Space Committee have worked diligently to develop parks and playgrounds in Helotes before all available land is lost to development. A 3 acre parcel at the corner of Parrigin and FM 1560 is slated to become the first public park and day-time playground in Helotes. Cash and in-kind contributions will be used to match a Texas state \$50,000 grant proposal to fund the playground.

There is also a 33 acre parcel located on Scenic Loop Drive north of Bandera highway that will hopefully become a park for Helotes providing play fields and hiking trails to the residents of Helotes. The cost of this parcel will be covered by funding from a developer (\$225,000) and matching funds from the state (\$343,000 requested from Texas Parks and Wildlife). Contributors for the remaining \$127,000 are currently being sought by city officials. Nonetheless, \$127,000 for 33 acres is quite a bargain when compared with \$150,000 PER ACRE the City of San Antonio is willing to pay for the 311 acre Voelcker Ranch.

The fact is that parks and open spaces greatly enhance the quality of life in a community, not to mention adding to its economic value, decreasing development density, and providing healthy options for kids to play, develop interpersonal skills, and mature in a positive environment. In addition, most everyone wants to live by a park.

Unless we set aside park land now, it will never happen. The few parcels of land available for parks today will soon be developed into houses or commercial enterprises. And once gone, they will be forever gone. It is not reasonable to think that lands once cleared and developed will be restored to their natural state and converted into parks and playgrounds. And any lands available in the future will be much more expensive than today.

There has been heartfelt support from the community to establish parks. Besides the cash and in-kind contributions, many have come forward to express their support and appreciation that parks are finally coming to Helotes. They understand that parks will be a legacy for our children, our children's children, and beyond. They understand that parks are the crown jewels of a community.

Ron Green
Chair, Helotes Parks and Open Spaces Committee