

News from the Helotes Heritage Association

Dear Readers,

Following is an expanded version of a recent letter to the editor sent to the Northwest Weekly and the SA Express News. The Helotes Echo refused to publish the letter. This information is a summary of actions by Mayor Schoolcraft and the Helotes City Council over the past six months to stymie the development of parks in the City of Helotes. The bottom line is that the city has had two opportunities to pay for parks by the State of Texas. On both occasions, Mayor Schoolcraft and the City Council chose to decline the funds using a variety of reasons.

At the root of their argument is that they are developing a playground behind City Hall. While any playground is a positive addition to the City, children cannot reasonably safely walk to City Hall to play. They have to cross Bandera Rd, walk down FM 1560, or be transported by car to get to the park. The two parks killed by the mayor were both within walking distance of neighborhoods and could have been essentially paid for by State funds. Following are details on the mayor's actions that killed the parks.

Rarely does a city benefit by getting money from the State of Texas for the purpose of establishing a park. Yet Helotes was offered this gift twice during the past year. Before being disbanded by Mayor Schoolcraft, the Parks and Open Space Committee developed plans and started development of the Parrigin park/playground. These plans included a fence and parking lot to be paid by a local foundation and a playground paid by a grant from the State. The entire park/playground would have been provided to the children and families of Helotes at no cost to the city. Last August, the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife awarded Helotes \$50,000 for swings, slides, playsets, and other playground equipment. The Parks and Open Space Committee had arranged for \$50,000 in matching funds and in-kind donations to qualify for the grant. Those matching funds are still available.

However, after winning the competitive grant, Mayor Schoolcraft informed the State that Helotes would decline the \$50,000. Mayor Schoolcraft decided that the citizens of Helotes would be better served by letting the city owned Parrigin property get overgrown with weeds than become a park and playground within walking distance by the children of Helotes Ranch Acres and Iron Horse Canyon.

The mayor claimed Parrigin Park is not suitable because it is flooded during heavy rainfalls. While the edge of the parkland closest to FM 1560 does flood during heavy rains, the rest of the property remains above flood waters. In fact, parklands are often located along floodplains. Similar to San Antonio, the City of Helotes has endorsed the development of a linear park system to be developed in floodplains. Parrigin Park would be a playground today, fully paid for by State funds and contributed donations, if the mayor and City Council had not taken deliberate actions to kill the project.

The Mayor and Council also passed on \$1,125,000 in matching funds from the State to establish the Sen. Madla Memorial Park. The Park and Open Space Committee had identified a 30 acre parcel (not on Scenic Loop) whose owners were willing to sell the land to Helotes at half the appraised value provided that it become a park. Once again, Helotes had an opportunity to gain a park, possibly at no cost to the City. In this case we will never know. After repeated requests by the Parks and Open Space Committee, Mayor Schoolcraft refused to even call to the land owners to see if an arrangement could be worked out for Helotes to get its first multi-use park.

So, for the second time in the past few months, Mayor Schoolcraft and the City Council declined State money to establish parks for the people of Helotes. These actions are difficult to justify at a time when they voted to raise taxes to the maximum allowed by the state presumably because the city revenue is insufficient. This is not being fiscally responsible and this does nothing for the children of Helotes.

Sincerely,

Ron Green, President

Helotes Heritage Association