

City will dedicate Martin Ray Reilly Park on Saturday

By George
Hostetter



Ryan Young, media relations coordinator for the Fresno Grizzlies, left, and Grizzlies head groundskeeper David Jimenez, right, check out the mobile stage parked behind the right-centerfield fence at Chukchansi Park.

JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

The Fresno City Council is making plans for a long-awaited celebration at the city's newest park.

Council members also are aiming for upgrades at several of Fresno's older parks.

"This has been a good day for our parks," Council President Oliver Baines said at the end of Thursday's meeting.

Council Member Clint Olivier started things by inviting his colleagues and Fresnans to Saturday's dedication of Martin Ray Reilly Park in southeast Fresno.

The park is at Chestnut Avenue and Highway 180. Festivities begin at 10:30 a.m. and will include entertainment.

The park "is a long-time coming," said Olivier, who represents the area. "It's going to be a great amenity for the people who live in the area and the entire city."

City Manager Bruce Rudd, a former parks director, said City Hall is committed to improving Fresno's parks system.

“Investment in our parks is investment in our neighborhoods,” Rudd said.

Efforts to make the Martin Ray Reilly Park a reality date back more than four years to when Henry T. Perea (now an Assemblymember) was the area’s council representative. A state grant of more than \$3 million was enough to begin construction. The challenge was finding money during the Great Recession to maintain the park.

Such money was in short supply, so the park remained in the planning stage. The economy improved, city purse strings were loosened and Wal-Mart donated \$10,000 to help with upkeep. Saturday’s party is proof that City Hall is serious about bringing green space to underserved neighborhoods, Olivier and Rudd said.

Rudd noted that two other parks often getting more talk than action — Universally Accessible Park west of Highway 99 and Cultural Arts District Park in downtown — will soon become reality. Both parks are also getting money from the state.

Parks Director Manuel Mollinedo went to the public microphone about an hour later to request the council’s OK to ask the state for \$1.3 million in grants. The money would be used at four parks:

- Vinland Park, \$135,650 for splash park equipment, court resurfacing, roof improvements and park furnishings.
- Mosqueda Park, \$370,000 for renovations to the auditorium, restrooms, landscaping and new walking path.
- Frank H. Ball Park, \$464,725 for aquatics improvements including restrooms, pool, pump, filters, interior lighting upgrades and new gym bleachers.
- California/Elm Gym, \$335,450 for new playground equipment, irrigation, landscaping, park furnishings and gym improvements, including a scoreboard.

The council quickly gave its approval, but not until Rudd took a moment to praise the work of grant writer Irma Yopez-Perez.

In other action, the council:

- Approved without discussion the sale of Chukchansi Park’s mobile stage to food-services company Ovations FanFare for \$25,000. The 40-ton structure cost an estimated \$330,000 in 2002. City Hall originally hoped the stage would be used throughout the year for outdoor entertainment acts at the downtown stadium. Those plans never came close to success, and the stage in recent years sat unused. City officials earlier this week said getting about eight cents on the dollar was the best deal possible.
- Listened to a report on the financial health of the city of Fresno’s retirement systems. Administrator Stan McDivitt said the systems are funded at more than 100%. Council Member Lee Brand said the financial strength of the pensions is a big reason the city avoided bankruptcy during the recent recession.

Contact George Hostetter: ghostetter@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6272 or [@GeorgeHostetter](https://twitter.com/GeorgeHostetter) on Twitter.

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