

Cary Catalano: Every part of Fresno needs more parks

By Cary
Catalano

“South Fresno needs more parks,” writes Sarah Reyes in a May 16 commentary in The Bee. I agree with her. Central Fresno, East Fresno, West Fresno and even north Fresno need more parks, too.

The Trust for Public Land’s annual ranking of municipal park systems, just released, says as much as it once again lists Fresno at the bottom of a long list tying for last place among large cities, at No. 74, with Charlotte, North Carolina.

Planning Commission member Cary Catalano says every part of Fresno needs more parks — and better maintenance of existing parks. | Provided by Cary Catalano

Of course, this is nothing new. We’ve been in last place for the past four years straight.

When I ran for Fresno City Council last year, I was keenly aware of this — not only from hearing concerns neighbors expressed to me as I canvassed the district about my candidacy, but also from having lived here all of my life, just like Sarah Reyes.

This is why my “Blueprint for Fresno” included a cornerstone to restore and preserve our neighborhoods and called for new parks to be added by increasing the list of area schools that open their playgrounds for public use in the evening and on weekends. My blueprint also called for refocusing our existing resources to ensure our neighborhoods are beautiful and maintained with a comprehensive street, sidewalk and tree maintenance and improvement program.

Imagine my excitement when, as a member of the Fresno City Planning Commission last December, I had the opportunity to recommend approval of the General Plan Update which identifies opportunities to add park space to established neighborhoods by co-locating with other facilities, just like the area schools I proposed in my blueprint!

This is why when I read about the city investing \$5.8 million new dollars for parks in the 2016 fiscal year budget, I was thrilled. The money will be used to make capital improvements at our established parks that need it the most. Badly needed repairs and renovations will finally be scheduled, and the list includes existing facilities that are almost exclusively all south of Shaw.

They include Vinland Park on Gettysburg between Chestnut and Maple; Cary Park near Fresno Street and Gettysburg; Frank H. Ball Playground in the heart of West Fresno; Holmes Playground at First and Platt in southeast Fresno, along with Pilibos Park in the heart of southeast Fresno. Pilibos will get renovated soccer fields and new soccer goals and spectator bleachers.

The \$5.8 million will also be used to add two brand new parks — one is west of Highway 99 near Polk and Gettysburg, to be called Inspiration Park, and the other is on the north edge of downtown, appropriately to be called Cultural Arts District Park.

Best of all, though, is the commitment being made by our city administration and our council members to not make this a one-time thing. In fact, The Bee’s George Hostetter reported that Mayor Ashley Swearingin said, “(B)efore this



administration leaves office in January of 2017, a long-term plan will be in place to achieve the parks standards our community truly deserves.”

This can and will be done if two things happen.

First, we need to use a balanced approach that provides both new green space investment and improves the quality of existing green space in the neighborhoods that need it most.

Second, you and I — and our entire Fresno community — need to work with the city, give our input and engage our voices so together we assure our quality of life is improved and our parks, both established and new, are all they can be.

I'm ready. Will you join me?

Cary Catalano serves on the Fresno Planning Commission and is a local business owner.