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NEWS

Council to discuss drone ban at park

An FAA guideline seems to favor it

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A Federal Aviation Administration guideline says that cities shouldn't allow drones or miniature aircraft to fly within five miles of an airport, and Menlo Park's Bayfront Park is within five miles of two airports, San Carlos and Palo Alto's.

The guideline is intended to prevent mid-air collisions.

Menlo Park City Council tonight will debate whether to ban the small aircraft from the park.

Against a ban

Some opponents of a ban, such as the vice chair of the parks and recreation commission, Tucker Stanwood, say that some things that are currently allowed in the park as "passive activities" are not that passive. Tucker cited bikes, dogs and kites as things that could affect the passive nature of the park.

The Parks and Recreation Commission has grappled with the proposed ban since January, and eventually split 3-3 on whether to recommend it to council. Stanwood was one of the commissioners who voted to allow drones

and miniature aircraft in the park. He created a proposal stating that drones and miniature aircraft should only be allowed during certain days and times and in a blocked-off location away from everyone else.

"I don't want Menlo Park to be a city of exclusion," Stanwood said.

Stanwood said that a ban is unrealistic, as there is no longer a ranger patrolling the park and he doubts that police will respond to many calls about the banned drones there.

Assistant Community Services Director Derek Schweigart said yesterday that the city has been working with the FAA on the proposed ban and said the agency's guidelines are flexible.

Schweigart said the city is drawing up a master plan for the park, and the plan would include "passive activities."

Namesake's son speaks out

Allan Bedwell sent a letter to council to support the ban, saying it is something his father, Mike Bedwell, the former city manager, would have supported. The park, officially called Bedwell Bayfront Park, is named after his father.

"I remember my father fought hard, along with many Menlo Park residents, to maintain Bedwell Bayfront Park as open space and a site for passive recreation," Allan Bedwell wrote.