

No hobby drones to be allowed in Holbrook-Palmer Park

Only commercial operators to be allowed permits



A DJI Phantom 2 drone controlled by Curt Walton hovers to shoot aerial video next to a home for sale in the hills above Saratoga, Calif., on Thursday, Feb. 25, 2016. Such drones might be used in Atherton's Holbrook-Palmer Park to videograph weddings and other events. (Gary Reyes/Bay Area News Group)

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The Atherton City Council had residents' privacy in mind on Feb. 15, when it held the first reading of an ordinance setting the rules for the use of drones in town.

The idea of camera-toting, remotely piloted aircraft peeking over the trees into someone's backyard was discussed at the meeting, supporting a section of the proposed ordinance that says nobody in Atherton may operate a drone "in a manner that violates an individual's reasonable expectation of privacy."

The ordinance, in part, reiterates federal rules for "unmanned aircraft systems," but carries the intent to maintain the town's own community standards even if "the FAA or industry associations reduce the level of protection at any point in the future."

The City Council is also against the use of hobby drones in Holbrook-Palmer Park, noting that the noise some drones make would disturb park users who enjoy peace and quiet.

Council member Bill Widmer said he was against allowing any drones in the park, but council member Rick DeGolia said he wanted them to be allowed for use by commercial operators for events such as weddings.

The council agreed that qualified commercial operators could use drones in the park by applying for a permit from the town.

The ordinance will get a second reading and likely adoption at the March 15 City Council meeting.

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