



CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

TO: Parks and Recreation Committee **DATE:** February 9, 2026

DEPARTMENT: Public Works

PREPARED BY: Chantell O'Neal, Assistant Director Engineering

PRESENTER: Chantell O'Neal, Assistant Director Engineering & Isaac Whippy City Manager

AGENDA TITLE: Receive Recommendation from the Parks & Recreation Committee and Provide Direction on Recreational Amenities to Include in the Reservoir and Community Forest Project Environmental Impact Report

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Receive the Parks & Recreation Committee's recommendation from its January 23, 2026 meeting; and
2. Provide direction on which recreational amenities should be included in the programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Reservoir and Community Forest Project.

Staff requests a yes/no determination for each amenity so that the EIR consultant can evaluate the full range of potential future uses and avoid the need for costly supplemental environmental review.

BACKGROUND

The City is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Reservoir and Community Forest Project. The primary purpose of the project is to construct three raw-water storage reservoirs to improve drought resilience and long-term water security. Because the City intends to open portions of the property for public access in the future, the EIR will also include a programmatic-level review of potential recreational amenities.

A programmatic analysis allows the City to evaluate a broad set of possible future uses now, so that future decisions can rely on this EIR without requiring a new, full CEQA document. Addenda and minor updates are common; however, adding new high-impact uses later could require a supplemental EIR, which is significantly more expensive and time-consuming. The current EIR contract is approximately \$600,000, so it is in the City's interest to identify the full range of potential amenities at this stage.

To support this effort and advance the City’s long-term parks and recreation goals identified in the Strategic Plan, the City Manager established a dedicated Parks & Recreation Department in July 2025. As part of this organizational focus, the City conducted a public survey in June 2025, which received 323 responses, held an EIR Scoping Meeting in September 2025, and convened the first Parks & Recreation Committee meeting on January 23, 2026. At that meeting, the Committee reviewed the survey results, received public comment, and provided preliminary direction, while requesting that the City Council make the final determination on future recreational uses.

The property contains rare Mendocino Cypress Woodland (pygmy forest), and the soils cannot recover once disturbed. The reservoir project itself will require mitigation for tree removal and habitat impacts, which may limit the amount of land available for recreational development. The EIR will evaluate feasibility and regulatory constraints for each amenity the Council chooses to include.

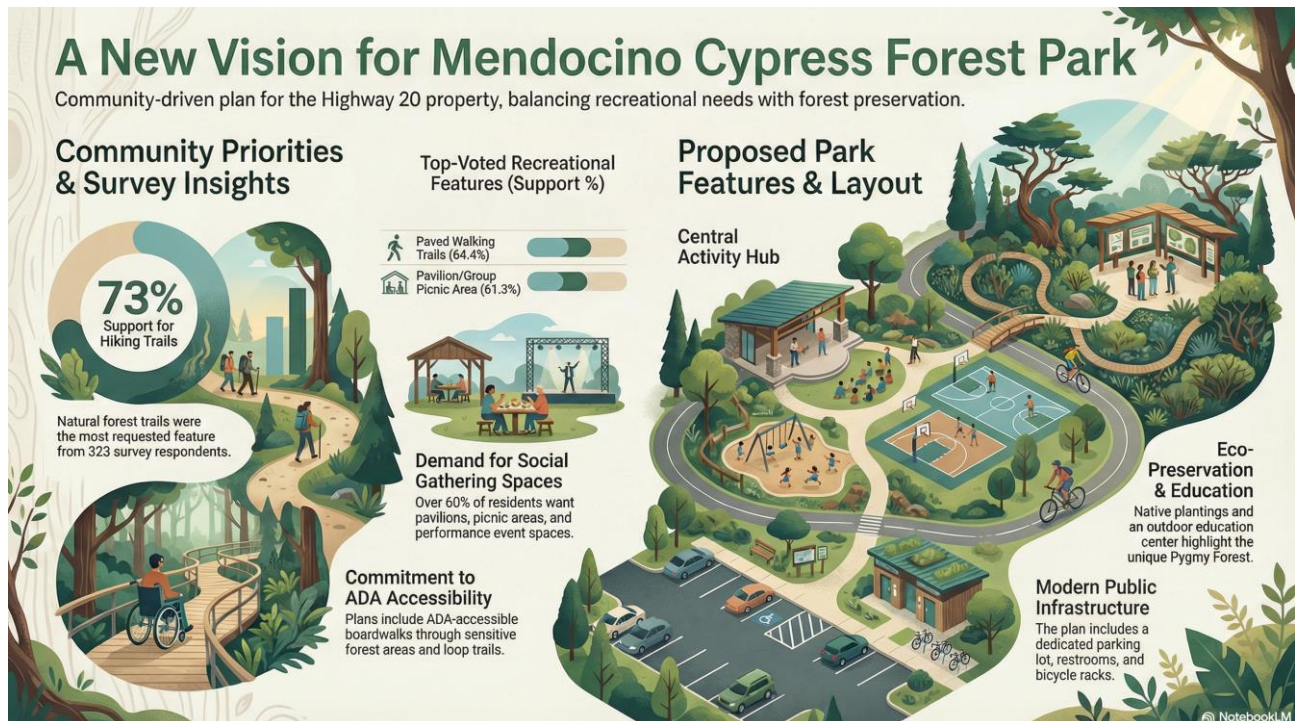


Figure 1: This figure was AI-generated and is for brainstorming purposes only

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

1. Purpose of Council Direction

The Council’s role tonight is not to select which amenities will ultimately be built. Instead, the purpose is to determine **which amenities should be analyzed in the EIR**, so that:

- The City avoids piecemeal CEQA review
- The consultant can evaluate environmental feasibility

- The City preserves flexibility for future decisions
- The reservoir project schedule remains on track

This is a **blank canvas**. No decisions have been made about locations, designs, or which amenities will ultimately be constructed.

2. Parks & Recreation Committee Direction (January 23, 2026)

Committee members expressed interest in evaluating **all amenities listed in the survey**, plus several additional concepts raised during discussion and public comment. Specific items highlighted by Committee members included:

- **Fire management of pygmy forest**, including potential CalFire grant funding for prescribed burns
- **Community Center / Banquet Hall** with kitchen and running water
- **Dirt bike track** (distinct from a pump track)
- **Pond or small lake** for scenic and limited recreational use (not the drinking-water reservoirs)
- **Flush restrooms** requiring well and septic
- **Performance stage**
- **Greenhouse or growing areas** for plants, herbs, or community agriculture

The Committee agreed to forward the full list of amenities to Council for final direction.

3. Full List of Recreational Amenities for Council Consideration

The following list includes **every specific amenity** identified in the survey, Committee discussion, and public comment. Staff requests a **yes/no** determination for each item.

A. Trails and Passive Recreation

- Walking/jogging trails (paved or unpaved)
- Hiking trails
- ADA-accessible trails
- Benches along trails
- Interpretive nature signage

- Boardwalks or interpretive loops
- Retention or decommissioning of existing informal/social trails

B. Biking

- Non-motorized biking trails
- Pump track (youth bicycle skills track)
- Dirt bike track (motorized)

C. Play and Family Amenities

- Playground
- Picnic areas
- Shaded pavilion/gazebo
- Small gathering spaces

D. Sports and Active Recreation

- Sport courts (tennis, pickleball, petanque, futsal, etc.)
- Athletic fields (soccer, football, baseball, softball, ultimate frisbee, disc golf)
- Multi-purpose field with multi-sport striping
- Running/walking track around a field

E. Educational and Interpretive Features

- Outdoor education space
- Interpretive elements (forest, soils, redwoods, pygmy habitat)
- Greenhouse or growing areas (herbs, food, native plants)

F. Event and Community Facilities

- Performance stage
- Event space for concerts or performances
- Community center/banquet hall with kitchen
- Space for temporary events (circus, carnival, Paul Bunyan Days, festivals)

G. Water-Related Amenities

- Pond or small lake (non-swimming, scenic, shallow)
- Fishing or boating on a non-reservoir water feature (*Note: Drinking-water reservoirs cannot be used for recreation.*)

H. Infrastructure

- Flush restrooms (well and septic)
- Pit toilets
- Parking areas
- Electricity for events

4. Environmental and Regulatory Considerations

The EIR will evaluate:

- Impacts to Mendocino Cypress Woodland and other sensitive habitats
- Soil disturbance (irreversible in pygmy forest)
- Tree removal and required mitigation
- Noise, traffic, and wildfire risk
- Water and wastewater needs for facilities
- Feasibility of motorized recreation
- Space limitations within the disturbed area
- Compatibility with reservoir construction and operations

Some amenities may be determined infeasible or require substantial mitigation. Including an amenity in the EIR **does not guarantee it will be allowed or built.**

FISCAL IMPACT/FUNDING SOURCE

There is **no direct fiscal impact** associated with providing direction on amenities. The EIR contract is already funded. However, adding amenities later could require a **supplemental EIR**, which would be costly.

Furthermore, a CEQA-cleared vision for recreation will improve the City's competitiveness for grants focused on nature-based recreation and outdoor equity.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Tonight's action is **not a project** under CEQA. Direction from Council will inform the scope of the EIR currently underway.

STRATEGIC PLAN/COUNCIL PRIORITIES/GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

The action supports goals related to:

- Water security and climate resilience
- Community recreation
- Public access to open space
- Long-term planning and fiscal responsibility

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Public survey (323 responses) in June 2025
- NOP Scoping Session September 16, 2025
<https://cityfortbragg.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=A&ID=1337676&GUID=337054F8-C977-45EC-A520-371E0EAB3D56>
- Parks & Recreation Committee meeting (January 23, 2026)
<https://cityfortbragg.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=A&ID=1379133&GUID=C96524EA-F76F-49B5-A3FC-0498500C9EE8>
- The next outreach will occur during the Draft EIR public review period

COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Parks & Recreation Committee reviewed the survey results, received public comment, and recommended forwarding the full list of amenities to Council for final direction.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Direct staff to evaluate a more limited list of amenities: This would reduce the complexity of the EIR but may require a costly EIR amendment if the City decides to add intensive features later.
2. Defer the selection of recreational amenities: This would delay the EIR schedule and potentially the start of construction for the reservoirs.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Survey Questions
2. Survey Summary Only (Raw Results can be viewed in the Committee Meeting Packet of January 23, 2026)
3. Mendocino Land Trust (MLT) Site Maps
4. Recreational Amenities Checklist for Council Action

NOTIFICATION:

1. Rincon Consultants
2. Mendocino Land Trust
3. Parks & Recreation Committee
4. Interested parties