

MOSSWOOD PARK - WHAT'S HAPPENING -- DECEMBER PANIL MEETING

The December 13 PANIL meeting focused on our closest city park: Mosswood Playground, the four-acre site nestled between MacArthur and 580, Broadway and Webster. While not in or even adjacent to the PANIL area, it's the only one around. For a century it's provided a place of recreation, entertainment and respite in this part of town.

Before the discussion of Mosswood, the meeting began, as is customary, with an update on area crime provided by Officer Tue Pollard. The report covered the period from November 8 to December 12. In that time there were:

- 4 strong-arm robberies, two on Broadway, one on the 4100 Block of Piedmont and one in the CVS Parking area.
- 10 stolen vehicles,
- 5 residential burglaries
- 20 auto burglaries

Despite the high number of auto-burglaries the officers have made 10 arrests, which is encouraging. The officer reported that the burglars are very fast and often work in teams as part of gangs. While Officer Pollard did not have last year's stats available, he did note that overall the rates are down in comparison to last year.

One particular crime of note was a Moraga Avenue neighbor-on-neighbor attempted murder that was thwarted by police. The assailant fired over a hundred rounds from a modified semi-automatic rifle before being apprehended by police. Fortunately neither the target nor innocent bystanders were injured.

Officer Pollard noted he will be stepping down or our neighborhood's Community Resource Office to take a position in a motorcycle detail in West Oakland. He promised a smooth transition to the new officer and provided his contact email of tpollard@oaklandnet.com.

The meeting moved to the topic of Mosswood Park. Margarita Rodriguez, who is in charge of recreational programs at the Park, was on hand to make a short presentation and answer questions. Olga Bolotina from Councilman Dan Kalb's office was also in attendance.

But before Margarita could talk about the programs, we asked Officer Pollard to brief us on public safety there,

and particularly the homeless problem. Officer Colin Cameron, who handles most of the issues there, could not attend and asked that we get the update from Officer Pollard.

There are currently 20-30 homeless campsites on or adjacent to Mosswood Park. Some sites appear to be abandoned, with only broken tents and trash left in their wake.



A few are on CalTrans property on the slope of the 580 freeway. Fences have been torn down gain access, putting animals and even unsupervised children at risk. Camping is prohibited, but Oakland police have been especially tolerant of the situation. Notices are posted but ignored with impunity. When asked if Oakland gets an inordinate number of homeless encampments relative to population, the Officer agreed. When asked if that was perhaps because Oakland was more lenient the neighboring cities, the Officer stated "those are your words not mine." Homeless encampments have become breeding grounds for tuberculosis and hepatitis A, stated the officer.

In the photo below, hypodermic needles, most likely from heroin users, litter the ground adjacent to the tennis courts where youth tennis lessons are provided.



Kaiser Permanente reps at the meeting commented that a large fire at a homeless encampment caused problems for customers and staff in their building on the southeast corner of the Park.

A member of audience from the Mosswood Park Advisory Committee noted that gardening staff are not really doing any work with the Mosswood Park shrubbery and trees. The City gardening staff is focused almost exclusively on the downtown parks.

The moderator asked that we shift the focus from the homeless, lest it take up all the time and not provide an opportunity for the Recreation Director to tell us what good things the park offers.

Mosswood Park was dedicated by the City in 1907. It provides facilities for softball, tennis courts (in poor condition), basketball courts (recently refurbished by Kaiser), an amphitheater, and play structures for children. The large grassy area in the park has been the venue music events and theater, such as the SF Mime Troop, which appear there almost annually.

In the center of the site is the Moss House mansion, a classic example of Carpenter Gothic built in 1864. The Oakland Heritage Landmark is in poor repair and only used for office and storage space by the Parks and Recreation Department and is closed to the public.

Additionally there is a well-maintained community garden on the northwest corner of the park. Those interested should stop on by on Saturdays to help out, or get a plot of your own.

The Mosswood rec center burned down on November 26, 2016. Rebuilding has not begun, due to permitting and insurance issues. Since then the park has had no bathrooms.

Margarita said the recreational programs have temporarily shifted to the Lake Merritt Garden Center. The after-school programs feature cooking, computer lab and homework help for children 5 to 11 years of age. Senior programs will be added soon. Shuttles have been set up to bring children from the Mosswood neighborhood over to Lake Merritt.

No plans are yet available for a new rec center, but six temporary modules are targeted to arrive on the site in early 2018, but no date was given.

For the sports enthusiasts there have been pick-up softball games on Sundays. The basketball courts are highly popular, and recently refurbished with help from Kaiser Permanente. They have been the inspiration for movies and video games.

The question was posed: what is the city doing to provide more space for the huge influx of population into the North Oakland area? Ms. Bolotina from Dan Kalb's office could not provide an answer. While open space requirements exist for individual properties, those spaces don't have to be public and there is no mechanism for adding more public park space in the existing planning and zoning mechanisms.

If you are interested in supporting the future of Mosswood Park, there are opportunities with the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Committee. Please contact Gretchen Till at grt.till@gmail.com, the chair, for more information.