

Larkspur OKs \$3.1 million for new rec facility

BY CALLIE RHOADES

CRHOADES@MARINIJ.COM

Larkspur is moving ahead with a plan to build a new recreation department building at Piper Park.

The City Council amended its budget on Dec. 3, approving a \$3.1 million project to construct a new facility for recreation department staff and the public. The modular building will have staff offices, three public restrooms and a classroom. It also will be all-electric and capable of further modular additions if the city chooses. The project will be funded through the city's general fund reserve.

City staff are expected to return to the council to separately request approval on the building's electric upgrades and vehicle charging capabilities, which might be eligible for different funding sources.

The project is estimated to be completed within a 12- to 18-month period. Julian Skinner, the public works director, noted at the meeting that the city is "very early" in the process, so the timeline could shift.

The new building will be open to the public. The classroom will be available for rent and for the city to run programs like reading clubs, art classes and after-school activities, according to Mayor Catherine Way.

"Larkspur has a very robust parks and recreation program," she said. "We would like to have our staff as close as possible to assist with the programming."

Recreation staff had been using a Larkspur-Corte Madera School District building the city rents at Piper Park. The school district informed the city that it needs the building back for its staff. Some recreation staff have already been relocated, and the city expects to need all staff out of the building by the end of 2026.

"Primary functions of the Recreation Department include overseeing the programming and rental of three facilities: the Hall Middle School Gym, the Hall Middle School all-weather field, and Piper Park," Skinner wrote in a report to the council. "Relocating the Recreation offices within or adjacent to these facilities is ideal, if not fundamental, to the services offered by the Recreation Department."

The project was the subject of lengthy conversations at City Council meetings. At an October meeting, the council was presented with several building options with various costs and features. The council was primarily split between two building options with a roughly \$500,000 cost difference between them.

“Do we spend the extra dollars here, or can the dollars be used elsewhere where we know we have some serious issues that need to be addressed?” said Councilmember Stephanie Andre.

“My life lessons have always been, when I’ve skimped, I’ve regretted it,” said Councilmember Scot Candell.

The council chose a 2,400-square-foot enhanced modular design in a 3-2 vote on Oct. 15. Andre and Councilmember Sarah Margulies were opposed.

At last week’s meeting, the council unanimously voted to move forward with the previously chosen project cost and allow staff to execute a construction contract with Kitchell CEM, a company with offices in California, Arizona, Utah and Texas.

“We spent two or three council meetings on this topic, because we, in Larkspur, assess our financial situation and we really work with our staff to come up with a variety of financial options for us so we can have a robust debate about them,” Way said. “And we did.”