

The Dilemma?

By Richard Krumbin - SHHA President

The SHHA's Board of Directors felt compelled to publish this special edition of **THE GRIT** to clear the misinformation abroad regarding the Park and circulated in an **unauthorized and misleading survey** late last month. First of all, it should be clear to all the members attending the June 4th Annual General Meeting that the SHHA Board supports the concept of a recreational facility for the enjoyment of *all* residents of Sandia Heights. Over the last 20 years of the park's existence, the Board has contributed a vast amount of time, effort and commitment to the development and maintenance of the park. The expenses to maintain the park have been a significant percentage of our annual budget, the funds of 40-45% of the net sums received from the Sandia Park Tram Company for collection of dues.

Although the Tram Company had represented to the SHHA that the lease of the park would go through 1997, they recently notified SHHA, without any advance warning, that a water tank would be installed in the north-east corner of the park, and that they would be willing to move it further northeast if the SHHA made a "long term commitment" for the park lease and maintenance (99 years?).

The SHHA Board assessed the following issues:

1. A disproportionate share of the yearly budget is spent paying for and maintaining a park currently used by a small percentage of the total residents of Sandia Heights.
2. The membership of the SHHA is voluntary, and only 60% of the residents are members.
3. Clearly the SHHA cannot make a long term commitment of a lease and capital expenditures.
4. Can we obtain the necessary approval of 75% of all residents of Sandia Heights to make membership in the SHHA compulsory? If so, the funds required for backing up a long term commitment for the park would be guaranteed.
5. At this time there is no indication that the majority of the residents are willing to make a long term financial commitment to save this park.
6. Although the park lease and expenses have been paid from dues received from members of the SHHA, the park has no controlled access and is open to anyone, including non-resident soccer clubs.

In summary, the issues are: First, whether or not the SHHA can enter into a long term contract without having a commitment that it will have the funding to back up this contract with the Tram Company; and, second can the SHHA spend 40-45% of its budget for a facility used by a much smaller percentage of the members and open to anyone, whether member or not.

The picture is not as simple as it was painted in the *unauthorized* survey sent out with last month's utility bills. The issue is not whether we are willing to continue membership if the park remains. The issue is whether the majority of the residents are willing to make a written long term financial commitment to save the park.

What are some of the options?

1. **Buy the land (or some other local acreage)?** It is owned by the Sandia Pueblo and is not for sale. If it were, or if another suitable property could be found, the going rate, based on \$100,000 per acre, would be around \$1/2 million. Unaffordable.
2. **Find a way to put the SHHA into a financial position which would make the lease proposal a real possibility and guarantee our ability to make long term payments?**
The only visible means to doing this would be to secure agreement from 75% of the residents amending the covenants to require *compulsory* membership in the SHHA. This was attempted a few years ago, but failed by a narrow margin. It still may be possible to achieve this and the Board would certainly welcome any input into that possibility. It would give the Association a very much stronger negotiating position in this and a number of other areas. It would give us a guaranteed financial base. It would put some real teeth into the Board's ability to influence the quality of life in the Sandia Heights.
3. **Continue to Pursue the County to provide acceptable recreational areas within range of Sandia Heights?**
This continues to happen and there are near-term developments (mentioned in Dick Stumph's discussion to the right) which look positive. The downside to this is that it then becomes a public park, open to all. The upside is that the County maintains it totally.

At this moment, the Board's leanings are towards the latter road. However, we have not ruled out other initiatives, and are open to suggestions from all members.

THE GRIT

SANDIA HEIGHTS HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION - SPECIAL EDITION JULY, 1994



Over 100 members attended the June 4 Sandia Heights Homeowners Association Annual General Meeting to hear the annual committee reports and specifically to listen to a detailed analysis of the reasons behind the Board's decision to discontinue support for the Sandia Heights Park in its present site and under the new conditions.

The Facts Behind the Board Decision To Quit Park Support

By Dick Stumph — SHHA Communications

During recent discussions with Alvarado Realty Company (ARCO), representatives from the Sandia Heights Homeowner's Association (SHHA) Board of Directors were made aware of ARCO's plans to expand their water facility. Specifically, ARCO has contracted to provide water for the planned APS Elementary School at Eagle Rock and Lowell (which will open in 1996), and the Primrose Point housing development. Unfortunately, this will require that part of the Sandia Heights Park be converted to a site supporting a large (150' X 12') water storage tank system. To the surprise of the current SHHA Board, this has always been a part of ARCO's long range plan for the Pueblo-leased land currently occupied by the Park.

ARCO did offer the Board an alternative to negotiate a 99-year agreement for the park, but made it very clear that, park or no park, the water storage tank would definitely be built on the park site this year. If SHHA did not enter into a long-term arrangement, the tank would go in the north end of the current ballpark. If the agreement was ratified, the tank could be pushed into the hillside about a 100 yards further north (see diagrams on Page 3).

In order to construct the tank and other works for the water system, the existing park will have to be essentially destroyed. Later reconstruction, including pads for various activities, levelling, seeding and re-installation of an irrigation system, will be necessary. No discussion has taken place regarding funding this work.

This issue was discussed in great detail at the 11 May, 1994 SHHA Board meeting. The cost of the park lease and maintenance, versus the benefit to the community as a whole did not make good sense. The wisdom of entering into a long-term lease with a financial base provided by only about 60% of the Sandia Heights Community (the SHHA members) was, at the least, dubious. These factors led the Board to unanimously conclude that the proposed long-term agreement should not proceed.

This is consistent with a 1992 Board decision, which followed an extensive poll of SHHA members, seeking their views on continued park funding (see Page 2). The Board's decision was communicated to the membership in **THE GRIT**, February, 1993 . . .

The SHHA should not lobby any person, company, or

government entity for extension or renewal of the lease for the Sandia Heights Park site.

The SHHA should get out of the park business no later than the expiration date (September 30, 1997) on the current lease agreement between Sandia Pueblo and the Sandia Peak Tram Company for the Sandia Heights Park site.

The Board assures the SHHA membership that it has been, that it is currently, and that it will be in the future, sensitive to the recreational needs of the community. While the planned new Play Park at Tramway & San Bernardino will not have softball and soccer fields, the prospect for new facilities in the general area, near Sandia Heights, is promising. A bond issue was passed in 1992 to establish a park to serve the needs of the far northeast community. This facility is currently under study by county officials and will serve both Sandia Heights residents and others in the area.

This decision was circulated to all members prior to the 4 June, 1994 Annual General Meeting, and an invitation to attend and discuss the pending closure was issued. Over a hundred members attended and heard SHHA President Richard Krumbin give a detailed and thorough analysis of the current state of play. A group of about ten members volunteered to become part of another Task Force to further examine the park issue. The group was asked by the Board to study alternate options and report their findings to the 13 July, 1994, Board Meeting.

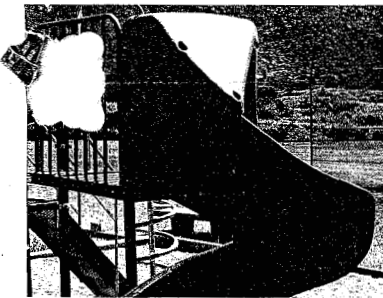
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Park History

The Sandia Heights Park was born in mid-1974, when 28 families contributed a total of \$328 to a playground fund. The site under consideration (the present park) was the old stable area. It would have a basketball goal and concrete pad, a baseball back stop, drinking fountain, and a swing set.

The joint labor and financial resources of the Tram Company and the SHHA brought the park into operation about a year later, in June, 1975.

Over the next decade, the park was levelled, grassed, irrigated, and improved in various ways. The arrangements between the SHHA and the Tram Company were loose and unstructured but, in general, the Tram Company did most of the maintenance work (including snow removal, mowing, watering and general maintenance) and billed SHHA for these services. Irrigation systems and seeding cost the members about \$10,000 in 1980. The actual cost of the water was borne by the Tram Company until February, 1987, when it began to be billed to the Association.



Examples of frequent, and costly vandalism at the Park.

Increased requests from residents for improved Park infrastructure brought increased costs. In an attempt to find some Park revenue, beyond members' dues, the Board sought an agreement with the American Youth Soccer Organization (soccer teams were the major users of the playing field and associated amenities) for a user fee to help defray Park upkeep costs. This was rejected (although the teams continued to use the facilities).

In 1986, the SHHA signed a general services contract with the Sandia Peak Tram Company for the Park maintenance. The \$6,000 annual fee covered a wide variety of services, including park maintenance (mowing, fertilizing, reseeding, repairs to the sprinkler system and sports/playground equipment), snow removal, and SHHA dues billing. An escalation clause provided an annual increase in fees of \$3,000 (ie. \$9,000 p/a in 1987 and \$12,000 in 1988). The contract expired at the end of 1988.

A new contract was signed on 1 January, 1989 calling for:

Assumption by the SHHA of the park maintenance responsibilities (later contracted to an outside firm for \$370 per month) covering mowing, fertilizing, and reseeding — sublease of the park site from the Tram Company for \$250/month — expenses for repair of the sprinkler system, backstop, basketball goals, and other repairs as needed — payment to the Sandia Peak Utility Company for water at the park — payment for refuse collection at the park. This five-year contract expired in January, 1994 and has not been renewed, although an ad hoc arrangement has been in place and substantial dialog has taken place between the two organizations.

(Continued on Page 3)

Park Surveys — Meaningful?

Residents Have Been Polled Before About The Park

In the 20-year history of the Sandia Heights Park, SHHA members have been polled twice regarding their views on Park expenditures by the Association. The first time (December, 1984) produced 19 responses out of 915 questionnaires distributed (via *THE GRIT*), and was ignored as invalid (12 wanted expenditure and 7 did not).

1992 Survey

The second poll took place a little over two years ago. The Board, having reviewed with some concern the mounting expenditure on the Park, which was now close to 50% of the members annual dues, sent out a postcard survey which posed the following:

Dear SHHA Member — Did you know that \$10,700 of the SHHA dues revenue from July, 1991 to February, 1992 was spent on the lease and maintenance of Sandia Heights Park? An additional \$5,000 in expenses is anticipated before the end of the 12-month period. This projected expenditure represents 45% of the net homeowners dues for this fiscal year. The SHHA Board thinks this sizable expenditure should be validated by a vote of support from the Association's members.

Sandia Heights Park is a private park situated on Sandia Pueblo land, which is leased from the Pueblo. Amenities at the park were jointly funded by the Sandia Peak Tram Company and the SHHA. Maintenance expenses are the responsibility of the SHHA. Though there are no County parks northeast of I-25, the SHHA's efforts to obtain assistance with park expenses were denied by the County attorney's office, on the grounds that the County cannot contribute to the support of any facility it doesn't (and cannot) own.

Please help the SHHA Board decide the future of Sandia Heights Park by returning the completed postage paid survey card before May 1, 1992. Every member's input is vital! Feel free to call with questions or comments.

The survey produced a high response (about 40%). The results were tabulated in mid-July and published as follows:

1. Is convenient access to a park important? Yes 227 No 206
2. If yes, which of these amenities should this park contain (Sandia Heights Park contains a. through d.)?
 - a. Soccer? Yes 303 No 43
 - b. Picnic tables? Yes 228 No 24
 - c. Basketball goals? Yes 197 No 46
 - d. Playground equipment? Yes 219 No 31
 - e. Other? (the principal comment under other asked for more trees/shade & toilets)
3. Are you in favor of the continued financial support of S H Park with SHHA dues? Yes 248 No 189
4. If NO how would you prefer dues to be spent? (A great variety of suggestions were offered in 1 block. The top 5 were (a) Increase security patrol, (b) Covenants control, (c) Reduce dues, (d) Road repair, (e) Trees/shade at the Park).
5. If land were available, would you be in favor of a County Park, within Sandia Heights, that's close to all residents? Yes 138 No 293

The Board concluded that this was not an overwhelming endorsement of continued Park funding and later concluded that the SHHA should "get out of the park business". This was ratified at an 11 December, 1992 Board meeting (see lead story).

1994 Survey

The present survey (which was not coordinated with or endorsed by the SHHA Board) poses the following:

The Sandia Heights Homeowners Association (SHHA) has recommended to discontinue funding the maintenance and watering of the Sandia Heights private park and recreation facility.

Of the 1,800 Sandia Heights residents, 61% are members of the SHHA. Currently the park represents 18% of the annual budget of the SHHA.*

The SHHA established a voluntary committee of Sandia Heights residents to look at options regarding the park needs of our community. We feel the present park adds to the quality of life in our neighborhood, as well as enhances property values. Please help us in determining the attitudes and opinions of Sandia Heights residents as it regards the current and future community park located on Juniper Hill Road. Please fill out this survey and return it with your utility bill payment to give the SHHA Board your viewpoint.

Are you a dues paying member of the SHHA?

Do you support SHHA continuing to maintain and to water the present park?

If not a member of the SHHA, would you be willing to join for \$3.50 per month in order to save the park?

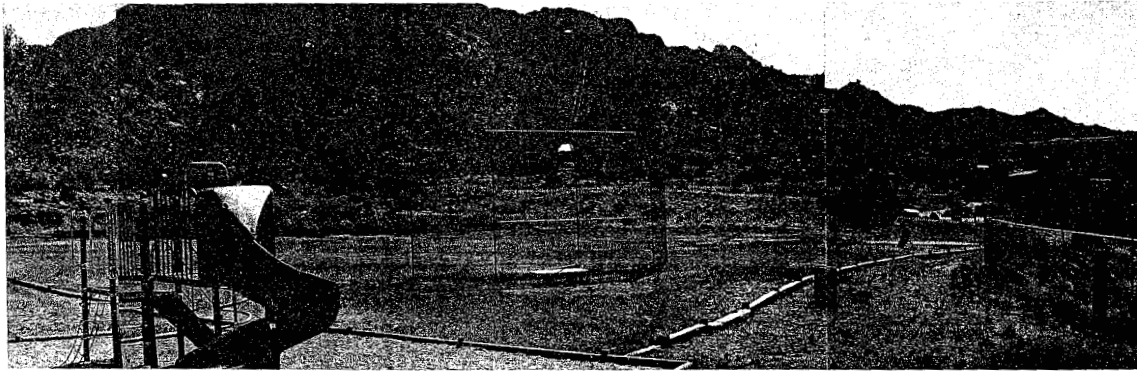
If your family is a current member of the SHHA, would you discontinue your membership if the park is closed?

* This figure derives from the fiscal 1993/94 Annual Financial Report estimate and is a percentage of the gross revenue. It actually represents about 25% of the annual member dues. The outgoing Chairman of the Parks Committee has, based on historical expenditure, estimated that the annual cost for lease, maintenance, equipment purchase & repair, and watering is about \$16,000 per annum (25% of the gross budget or about 35% of members dues).

Survey Interpretation

As any pollster out there can tell us, the value of a survey depends heavily on the wording of the proposition that is put, the way the questions are posed, and the level of information in the hands of the respondent. It also depends on the bias of the respondent group. Were the 40% of the members responding in the 1992 poll truly representative? Did the remaining 60% fail to respond because they could care less about the Park?

In the final analysis, it comes down to the Board's assessment of whether or not a disproportionate share of members dues are being channelled into any one particular activity. In 1992, they decided that that was the case. In 1994, the terms and conditions have seemingly deteriorated significantly and the Board has again concluded that too much of the members' money (over a third of it) is being focused on a single amenity with a dubious future. It does not represent a Board viewpoint that the Park is undesirable . . . quite the opposite. It does, however represent a collective (unanimous) Board view that the cost and uncertainty for the future dictates the need for extreme prudence.



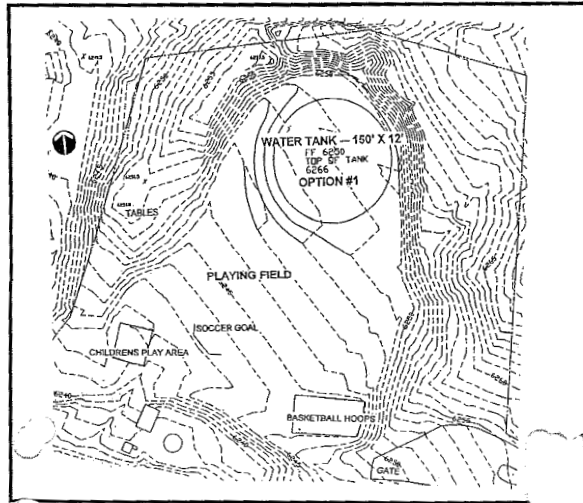
- Above** Sandia Heights Park looking north
- Right** UpperTank location Option #1
- Right** LowerTank location Option #2
- Lower** Sandia Heights Park looking south

(Park History — Continued from Page 2)

Water bills caused by both normal use and frequent leakages became a concern. The 1991 cost for water was \$5,719.

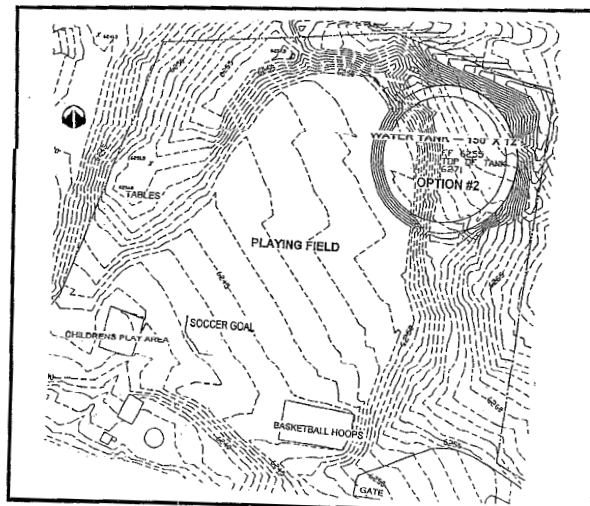
The escalating expenses (up to 50% of members dues) caused the Board to view the future with some alarm. In 1992 the survey discussed on page 2 was initiated and a long term policy to move away from private park support was agreed upon.

Following the Tram Company's bombshell announcement that they intended (and always had) to put a large water tank on the park site, the SHHA Board could find no other alternatives than to abandon the Park program.



**Park Cost Breakdown
(1992 Numbers rounded)**

Lease	3,000
Refuse Collection	140
Repairs	1,640
Maintenance	4,440
Water	5,700
Staff time	420
Miscellaneous	550
Total Annual Cost.....	\$15,890



Special GRIT issue — The Sandia Heights Park Debate

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THE GRIT



Sandia Park Closure Clearing the Air

The above sign, and others like it, appeared on the SHHA Bulletin Board in late June. At the same time, a questionnaire was distributed to all residents with the last utilities bill, asking for comment on the pending Sandia Heights Park closure.

These were not SHHA initiatives.

The Park dilemma was covered in some depth at the 4 June, 1994, SHHA Annual General Meeting. Over 100 members attended. However, the Board feels the necessity to fully clarify the issues for members and other residents of the Sandia Heights community. Hence this special edition of *THE GRIT*, which is devoted entirely to getting the air clear. The information on the following pages sets out to do just that. It is being distributed to all residents.

The next meeting of the SHHA Board is on Wednesday Night, 13 July, 7 PM at Fire Station # 5 - Paseo del Norte. Any submissions on this matter may be received at that meeting.