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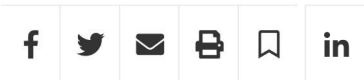
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# Future of Crystal Springs Cross Country Course in Belmont to be decided soon

Community college district, homeowners group battle over size of events

By Nathan Mollat Daily Journal staff  
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The question of the continued usage of the Crystal Springs Cross Country

Course in Belmont was kicked down the road due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is now coming to a head.

The San Mateo County Community College District is in the final stages of making a decision on the future use of the venue with a Board of Trustees meeting scheduled for next week, during which the college district hopes to reopen talks with a neighborhood group that is trying to rein in the number and size of events.

“At this point, what we want to do is have a board discussion at our next board meeting,” said Maurice Goodman, SMCCCD trustee, who added that a final decision will not be made at the Aug. 25 board of trustees meeting.

“This (meeting next Wednesday) is just an opportunity to get the dialogue going again.”

The Crystal Springs Cross Country Course is situated on land owned by the San Francisco Public Utility Commission roughly at the Highway 92 and Interstate 280 interchange and is a premiere cross country course. As such, it is a popular destination for dozens of middle school and high school programs on the Peninsula — and from points further north and south — to use as a race course. The bulk of the usage comes during roughly three months, as the high school cross country season runs from early September to late November.

However, the issues of parking, traffic and the sheer number of people who

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attend have been an ongoing problem for some homeowners in the neighborhood across the street from the park that fronts the course. When the College of San Mateo indicated in 2019 it was looking to get out from the permit to use and maintain the course, the Belmont Height Civic Improvement Association decided it was time for the college district and those who use the facility to address the issues the group had.

“We were the first, and maybe only, group who contacted CSM who wanted to work with the sports folks to keep it open,” said Deniz Bolbol, the head of the BHCIA. “We all support the kids running the course. Nobody wants to close the course. Everybody wants to keep the course open.”

And that’s precisely where Bolbol thought discussions were heading. The BHCIA was working with several groups — including the city of Belmont, the Peninsula Athletic League and the Central Coast Section, and the SMCCCD — to come up with solutions to mitigate the homeowners’ concerns.

Users of the course, mostly high school and middle school teams and groups, were willing to split some of the races over more days and to cut the number of days events would be held.

“They had a legit complaint, when you look at the number of meets held in a short amount of time. It was close to 40,” said Steve Sell, Aragon athletic director and Central Coast Section president. “It’s arguably one of the best courses in the United States of America. You could see why people want to use it and you can see why the neighborhood group had had enough.”

Sell did not get involved as Aragon AD or CCS president. He said he was simply taking part in the discussions as part of the county’s athletic community.

“I was asked to attend some of the meetings because I have a connection with the neighborhood group and I do care, very much, about the future of cross country in this area,” Sell said. “I want to be part of the solution. The last thing anyone wants is for that place to get shut down. Being an athletic director, that’s the last thing I want to see happen.”

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It appeared the groups were on the same page. Some races were cut from the schedule, up to 30%, Bolbol said. But then talks hit a snag, she said.

“They had really great ideas and it really seemed we were moving in the same direction. ... Everything was humming along,” Bolbol said. “Until CSM did an about face.”

Bolbol said in early January, she received an email from CSM that “told me they would not budge on the scale of events,” Bolbol said.

And once she saw the events that were canceled, she questioned whether attempts were made in good faith to alleviate concerns as she said all the smaller events were omitted from the schedule, but the big races — the PAL and CCS championships — were still on the docket.

Bolbol said her goal was not to just lop off the smaller meets or shut out the middle schools — which she said was part of preliminary discussions. She wants to support the local athletes, but where does the term “local” stop? Leagues from around the CCS use the Crystal Springs course not only for invitational meets, but also for league championships. Bolbol questions if the sport is so popular, why are users trying to cram everything into only a couple facilities?

“We would make exceptions for our local kids. We want to accommodate our local kids, but the folks coming from further away need to figure something else out,” Bolbol said.

If it were only that easy, Sell said.

“That’s the hard part. The nature of that sport is you have some decent sized leagues — PAL, BVAL, SCVAL — and when you have a championship meet, it’s going to draw a lot of people,” Sell said. “It seems the overscheduling was handled and that there was a good faith effort to reduce the impact the course has on the neighborhood. ... Obviously the neighborhood community wants \_

more.

“If it were easy to build or find (space for) or have a cross country course that accommodates this many high schools, we would not be having this discussion. ... They’re living next to a gym. I don’t know how else to put it.”

The college district paid for a mediator to work between it and the homeowners’ group and they still could not come to an agreeable solution. So now the SMCCCD, which already owns the permit to use the course, will make a final decision on the facility in the coming weeks.

“It would be really nice to work together as a community,” Bolbol said. “Some neighbors love unregulated growth and other neighbors want it managed.”

Said Sell: “The reality of it is, the SMCCCD holds the lease. They’re going to be the ultimate judges of what happens and what they feel comfortable as far as authorizing meets up there.”

