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# Park's neighbors seek alcohol ban

## Restrictions at beaches led to increased activity

By Jennifer Bowman, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Thursday, February 11, 2010 at 12:02 a.m.

PACIFIC BEACH — When San Diego matriarch Kate Sessions donated land to create a park for children and families, she wasn't anticipating it would become a hot spot for fraternity parties.

“If she were to see what goes on at her park now, she would roll over in her grave,” said Bill Kiernan, president of the Santa Clara Recreation Council.

Tired of being overrun by what they say are drunks who can no longer party at the beach because of 2008's successful Proposition D banning alcohol on beaches, residents and community groups in Pacific Beach are trying to get a 24-hour alcohol ban at Kate O. Sessions Memorial Park. If the ban is passed, the 79-acre area would be added to the 21 San Diego parks that prohibit the use of alcohol.

Park visitors are allowed to drink from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

That the park is open to those wanting to down a few adult beverages during the day and early evening has not gone unnoticed by people prohibited from drinking at nearby beaches.

“Perfect for sloshball, beer olympics, or just a day at the park,” Amanda A. wrote on Yelp.com. “We managed to score a great piece of land for an amazing game of sloshball.”

The park is named after a local horticulturalist known as the “Mother of Balboa Park.” Kate O. Sessions Park is on Soledad Road between Pacific Beach and La Jolla.

Friends of Kate Sessions Park proposed the ban to the Santa Clara and Pacific Beach recreation councils in November. The group cited public intoxication, public urination, underage drinking and drunken driving among their concerns.

Both councils and the Pacific Beach Planning Group support the ban.

“It became clear that something needs to be done in order to re-establish the park as a neighborhood park,” said John Shannon, chairman of the Pacific Beach Planning Group.

The proposal moves to the city’s Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee. From there, it would go before the Park and Recreation Department and then the City Council.

Richard Kiser, Friends of Kate Sessions Park president, said his group has hearings with the parks department next month.

Kiernan said the park’s alcohol policy has been abused mainly by college students who use the area for fraternity festivals and drinking games, creating an unfit environment for neighborhood families.

“I took my two daughters to the park, and at the entrance was two boys with (whiskey),” he said. “They couldn’t even walk. They were just laying there passed out. It was a little disgusting.”

Opponents of the ban say the proposal is too extreme. Brent Wagner, owner of Day of Games, a company that sells sports products, said the same inappropriate behavior at the park occurs in other public locations.

“People that break the law, there’s ramifications for those people in general,” Wagner said. “You can say the same thing when it happens inside of a bar or a restaurant. They’re going to get in trouble.”

Instead, certain areas of the park should be designated for alcohol use, he said.

Wagner’s company also runs Dog- Daze, a leisure sports league that conducts games, including horseshoes and bocce, at the park. While leisure sports do not require alcohol, the games are designed so players can drink while participating, Wagner said.

“I don’t think it should be legal to sit there and do keg stands,” he said. “But hanging out, playing games and having an occasional beer or two shouldn’t be against the law.”

Friends of Kate Sessions Park says it is OK with special events where alcohol can be served, as long as a permit is obtained.