

A gym, not a hot tub

DOES THE NEW city of East Palo Alto really need a health and fitness center that would include a hot tub, sauna, weight room and two racquetball courts? Members of the planning and parks and recreation commissions apparently think so, because they have approved plans for just such a center at the site of the old recreation facility on Bell Street.

It's easy to understand why they favor renovation of the building: The city will get \$326,000 in federal rehabilitation funds for the project if a contract is signed by the end of the year.

However, it's not easy to understand why the commissioners favor inclusion of such trendy amenities as a sauna and hot tubs in a recreation facility that can expect the heaviest use by those under the age of 20. The teen-agers and younger children who have traditionally used the recreation center most often don't care about hot tubs — they want a gymnasium where they can dance, play basketball and participate in all the other

activities a gym usually accommodates.

True, East Palo Alto is planning to buy the Ravenswood High School site from the Sequoia Union High School District, which would give the city a gymnasium. But that purchase is by no means settled yet.

Even if it is settled and East Palo Alto gets the Ravenswood site, the city would have more flexibility with a second gymnasium at the Bell Street site. Gymnasiums lend themselves to a variety of uses; hot tubs and saunas do not. Besides, as Planning Commissioner Tikisa Anderson noted in opposing the fitness center, there probably would be extra costs involved with maintenance of hot tubs and weight machines that residents could not afford.

The City Council is to make a final decision on the Bell Street site Monday. We urge the council members to consider those residents who need a recreation center most — the children — and opt for a gymnasium.