

If one resides in a neighborhood lacking in green space or recreation facilities in San Francisco, the Open Space Fund has been a beacon of hope for 30 years.

The Fund (a 2.5 cent per \$100 assessed value set aside of property taxes), which, as of 2000, has provided almost \$300 million to Rec and Park, with the expectation that it would be filling in the open space and facility gaps in neighborhoods without these vital assets. While the Fund has provided critical new recreation centers (for example in the Richmond, Tenderloin and Chinatown neighborhoods), new parks and open spaces such as Bayview Hill and the newest gem at Parque Ninos Unidos in the Mission, and new recreation opportunities like the Skateboard Park at Crocker Amazon, many San Francisco neighborhoods are still suffering a serious shortage of parks, playgrounds, and open spaces for "breathing room." In fact, NPC's almost-completed six month study of open space has found that the city has acquired less than 100 acres of property since 1974 (compared with the 48 acres of parkland coming on line at one private project – Mission Bay); it has also largely failed to meet the General Plan's mandate to target "high-need areas."

What went wrong and where did all the money go if not for new parks and recreation centers in target neighborhoods? The answer is that it went for a lot of good things, including the Department's Urban Forestry, Natural Areas, and Volunteer Programs, but all of these operating costs (as opposed to the capital cost of purchasing property) have depleted the fund's potential to rectify the imbalance in available parks and facilities around the city. Only \$8 million a year of the \$22 million open space fund is now applied to capital improvements, including acquisitions. Salaries, many of them stuffed into the Fund to avoid lay-offs in tough budget years like the last two, now consume close to two thirds of the annual appropriation. Currently, the Department has only about \$1 million to spend on property acquisition from the Open Space Fund although this amount is a floor, not a ceiling (5% of the Fund is mandated for open space acquisitions). However, the Neighborhood Park Bond is being spent far more quickly than expected and, therefore, this additional source of possible funding for land acquisitions is not a high priority for the Department which is quickly running through the bond funds (\$71 million of the \$110 million has already been spent, although many of the projects have not yet been completed).

If we accept the premise that providing parks and recreation opportunities in every neighborhood is a fundamental equity and environmental justice issue, then it is essential to develop an action plan to redress our open space deficiencies, fund adequate maintenance of parks including the new parks to come, and to seize the opportunities before us especially along the eastern corridor of San Francisco. We clearly need to think out a new model for both acquisitions and park maintenance. Sometimes it helps to look at how other cities are handling the same job, so we found it useful to study Seattle's efforts.

Seattle passed a "Pro Parks Levy" in November 2000, six months after the passage of San Francisco's \$110 million bond. Seattle's program covers 8 years and their tax will provide them \$198.2 million during that time period. What is striking about their capital program funded by the levy is the specificity of the ballot measure regarding acquisition. The levy provides 3 pots of funding available to help ensure that targeted neighborhoods really do get new parks. The largest pot earmarks funding for 30 specific sites to be acquired; a second pot provides funding for 19 acquisition and development projects; and the third pot (Neighborhood

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NEIGHBORHOOD PARK REPORT #32

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South Park before the 1906 fire. Flats have replaced the homes and eucalyptus trees have replaced former plantings.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY CENTER

South Park

In 1852, an aristocratic Englishman, entrepreneur George Gordon, began buying up lots between Bryant and Brannan and Second and Third Streets, on what he described as the only level spot free of sand in the city. There, at the base of fashionable Rincon Hill, he designed and built South Park, San Francisco's first planned community. Modeled on the squares, ovals and crescents in London and New York City, it featured 68 elegant residences of uniform architecture circling a 550 ft. grassy oval park that was ringed by a locked ornamental railing. Only the homeowners had keys. A Dutch windmill in the middle of the park pumped water for residents who paid a monthly fee for maintenance of the property. Streets and sidewalks were the first in the city to be paved, and on sunny days, the park was crowded with white-uniformed maids watching over children at play.

Home to many of the city's civic leaders, intellectuals, legislators and captains of industry, the area flourished as a wealthy enclave until 1869 when Second Street was built, cutting through the center of Rincon Hill to the waterfront and making the area accessible to the working poor. The wealthy migrated to Nob Hill and working class families moved in to enjoy the park and its sunny weather.

In 1897, the city acquired the site, established it as a public park and removed the locks on its gate. In 1906 the earthquake and fire removed the neighborhood.

After the fire, South Park was rebuilt into a motley collection of warehouses, machine shops, sleazy hotels and honky-tonks. An influx of immigrants – Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Mexicans, and Afro-Americans – was joined in the '30s by longshoremen. To warm themselves while waiting for calls from the Union Hall, they built a bonfire in the middle of the park. Noxiously, it burned for the next 40 years, furthering the park's decline into a dangerous slum abandoned by city planners. It was fed with construction refuse, neighborhood garbage and junk and the park became a gathering place for drug addicts and the mentally ill. The city provided them with wood so that they wouldn't demolish historic buildings for fuel.

In the late '70s, when the low-rent site began attracting a few intrepid artists and other professionals, South Park began a turnaround. The

architects, designers and photographers who moved into live/work spaces formed a South Park Improvement Association, and worked to evolve a European-style neighborhood. By the end of the '80s, it had become a mixed-use residential and commercial district with restaurants, businesses and retail shops (including several famous discount outlets for women's wear) on the ground floor, and apartments above. Fast forward to the "irrational exuberance" of the dot-com explosion. In the mid-'90s South Park became "the cultural hub of San Francisco's trendy interactive media district." (*The New York Times*). Rents zoomed skyward, new restaurants sprang up, as did their prices, artists and small businesses were edged out.

The boom came to an end in 2000, and the park's retail and restaurant businesses hit hard times. By 2003, however, the neighborhood seems to be edging back. NPC is holding its second annual gala at the park on October 9th, hoping to attract visitors who may not have visited this unique neighborhood park. "Vacancy" signs are decreasing and new people are moving in – architects and industrial designers, joining those who, like architect Toby Levy, stayed through boom and bust. In fact, Levy who has lived and worked at South Park since 1984, is expanding her studio and office.

A grant from Rec and Park's Renaissance campaign funded new picnic tables, benches and lighting fixtures that were installed three years ago. Further improvements under Rec and Park's Capital Plan are on its '03-'04 calendar, and at the district park planning meeting this month (September, ed.), the community will discuss priorities and options. Friends of South Park's Louise Bird, a longtime resident, hopes that new residents in the neighboring apartments and high-rise buildings will attend the NPC gala and as the slogan says, "Rediscover South Park on Thursday October 9th." "We want this to be a park for everybody in the community. It's not just for those of us living on the circle," she declares.

– Jeanne Alexander, Neighborhood Parks Council

ESTABLISHED: 1852
LOCATION: BETWEEN 2ND & 3RD STREETS, BRYANT & BRANNAN
BUS: #15 THIRD; #10 TOWNSEND
CONTACT: LOUISE BIRD 415-957-0199

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS COUNCIL #32

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UPDATES

Open the Gates!

This summer, hundreds of people celebrated the Grand Opening of **Crocker Amazon Playground** (Moscow and Geneva), the largest play structure in SF. Anxious to play, children chanted enthusiastically, "Open the Gates, Open the Gates" and before the officials could finish their speeches, the kids rushed the stage, eager to explore the new play equipment. NPC would like to thank the more than 300 volunteers who came out on Build Day to put together the play equipment and everyone who celebrated the Grand Opening. If you have not yet seen the new playground, pack up the kids and a picnic – the new **Crocker Amazon Playground** rocks! Kudos to the Crocker Amazon community and the **Playground Campaign** for a great success.

Diggin' Helen Wills

As a result of the much anticipated and well-deserved \$1.5 million grant from the State of California's Department of Parks and Recreation (thank you **Supervisor Aaron Peskin**), Helen Wills Playground, located at the West entrance to the Broadway Tunnel, will break ground this month. Congrats to **Julie Christensen, Krystn Kuckelman** and **Friends of Helen Wills** for getting this project going!

Park Hipsters

This summer, well-known SF landscape architect, **Topher Delaney**, hosted NPC's pre-gala event at her hip, new studio on Illinois Street. **The Mayor** revved up the crowd and promised to continue working for our parks. Other notables in attendance included: NPC Gala co-chairs, **Louise Bird & Jeffrey Leibovitz**; **Treasurer Susan Leal**; **Deputy Director, DPW, Muhammad Nuru** and architect **Piero Patri**.

Time Out for Tai Chi

Always wanted to try Tai Chi? Now you can, for free! Tai Chi is a form of Chinese exercise that uses slow, graceful movements to increase range of motion, strength, coordination and flexibility. For a listing of the FREE Tai Chi classes in San Francisco parks and neighborhoods, please contact **Peter Vaernet**: (415) 575-5733.

Great Idea Department

The folks at **Pink Triangle Park** (Market and Castro) have installed a simple transparent container box that holds flyers for people to take next to the bus stop outside of their park. The flyers include a brief history of the park and ways to get involved. Now, why didn't we think of that?

Rabbit, ribbit!

This July, **Chris Giorni, Tree Frog Treks** teamed up with NPC's Nature in the City program to lead a dozen kids from Gene Friend SoMa Rec Center (6th and Folsom) on a trek through the wilds of **Glen Canyon Park**. The children, ranging in age from 6 to 12, plus NPC and Rec Center staff arrived at the park to meet Chris and his iguana. The kids also got a chance to interact with a tortoise and various snakes – up close and personal. However, only the lucky iguana got to join the group for the hike.

Back on Track at Boeddeker

The only park open to adults in the Tenderloin district, Boeddeker Park (Jones and Eddy) is known for being run-down and far from welcoming. Recently, NPC joined with Boeddeker staff and neighbors to form a much needed **Friends of Boeddeker Park**. Thanks to volunteers from the local Boys & Girls Club, the Tenderloin Sidewalk Improvement Program, and homeless men from the neighborhood, the first two workdays were a great success.

Newest and Youngest Park Advocate

Congrats to the **Lichtenwalters, Friends of Rossi Playground**, on the arrival of their new baby boy – Clay Robert Lichtenwalter, 7 pounds, 8 ounces. Mom and baby are well.

23rd St. – a Real Treat!

Congratulations to neighbors, students and teachers in the Mission district who over the past eight years have worked with RPD to turn an abandoned lot at 23rd Street and Treat into a beautiful new children's park and community garden. Parque de los Ninos Unidos celebrated its grand opening in July and NPC has worked with the neighbors to form a **Friends of Parque de los Ninos Unidos**. For information, contact **Pat Delgado**, neighbor at (415) 641-4263 or **Gerl Almanza, PODER** at (415) 431-4210.

Lake Merced on the Rise

Thanks to water additions in October and April, and a strong late spring rain, as of July 1st, 2003, the level of the lake was about a foot and a half higher than it was in July 2002. At print time, plans were being made to add as much as two feet of additional water at the end of summer to further enhance the water quality and increase the lake level. For more information, contact **John Plummer, Friends of Lake Merced**: (650) 991-0409.

A New Face in the Crowd

Please welcome the latest addition to our staff: **Justina Cross**, Communications Assistant and Web master, (415) 621-3260, jcross@sfneighborhoodparks.org. An experienced Web designer, Justina also brings her marketing and audio/visual skills to help with the overall communications of the organization.

The Fruits of Labor

This spring, Rolph Neighborhood Association and children from Good Samaritan planted seeds that are now in full summer bloom and attracting more neighbors (and bees) to the park Rolph Playground. One parent recently told us they never wanted to go to the park until they saw the garden...now they bring their kids "all the time." If you have any plants to donate to the garden, please contact **Karla Melara, Good Samaritan** at kmelara@hotmail.com.

Sound off!

NPC recently co-hosted a successful and educational Q&A session with top mayoral candidates. Thanks to everyone who attended and asked important park-related questions. Now, just be sure to VOTE on November 4th!

Mayor's Awards

Lower 24th Neighborhood Association, Rolph Playground Neighborhood Association and **Park Presidio Neighbors** recently received grants from the Mayor's Neighborhood Beautification Fund to spruce up their parks. NPC is proud to be their fiscal sponsor. Congratulations to all.

On Second Thought

In the July/August 2003 newsletter, we erroneously wrote that **Friends of Duboce Park** has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with RPD, when in fact, the MOU is with **Friends of Dolores Park** and RPD and is still a working document. Duboce, Dolores...those pesky D's!

In Loving Memory

A friendly neighborhood activist in every sense of the word, **Jo-Carol Davidson**, president, Cayuga Improvement Association, promoted the preservation of Cayuga Park and the unique sculptural creations of gardener **Demi Bracerros**. Also a longtime vocalist on the San Francisco music scene, Jo-Carol was primarily known as a disco and rock artist who was making her way into the world of Cabaret.

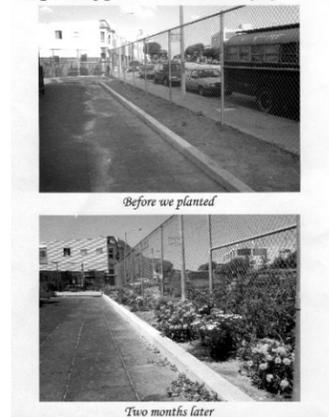
Claire McGhee was a dedicated member of Russian Hill Neighbors and served as President of the organization from 1998 to 2000. Her contributions to Russian Hill and to the City are a permanent and treasured legacy. She was a member of Friends of Fay Garden, Fay Park Advisory Committee and Friends of Helen Wills Playground, among other groups. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of Jo-Carol and Claire. They will be missed.

– **Amber Rosenberg**

THE SIGN OF A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

NPC's ParkScan team is growing rapidly and is in dire need of a PC laptop computer in good working order (ideally with Windows 2000 or Windows XP loaded). Your generous donation will help support a great program, and is an easy write-off come tax time. For more information, please contact **Hal Voegel**, (415) 621-3260. Please note: You can now make a conditions report for any park. See www.parkscansf.org

Rolph Playground Community Garden



Open Space Fund . . . continued

Opportunity Fund) provides each neighborhood with the opportunity to receive a grant from \$15,000-\$100,000 toward capital projects that they select, including acquisition. Thus in 8 years, Seattle (a medium density city) will be likely to acquire more open space than San Francisco has pieced together in 30 years.

The advantage of a levy as opposed to a bond is that funding can also be designated for maintenance. The ProParks Levy provides \$13 million for extra maintenance above and beyond regular maintenance,¹ including custodial. Seattle's expenditure per acre, prior to the ProParks levy was below San Francisco's (\$13,869 versus \$21,158) although they have almost double the acreage to maintain. At the same time, their pre-levy budget in 2002 was more than San Francisco's (\$85 million versus \$70 million) and staffing at 910 Full-Time Employees (FTE's) as compared to San Francisco's 680.² Clearly, the strategy taken with their levy is to retain their core general fund commitment to maintenance and programming, bring their parks up to an excellent standard with new maintenance efforts under the levy, and hope that the voters will like the result with a renewal of the tax at the end of eight years.

Unfortunately, San Francisco views every pot of extra funding voted by the taxpayers for specific purposes as an opportunity to cut its General Fund commitment to that service. Our core commitment to park maintenance from the General Fund has gone down over the years and thus our Open Space Fund can barely serve its original purpose nor is it providing any added value in maintenance. Our city needs to ensure that the positions required to maintain our parks, plant and prune our trees, run our after school programs, and encourage and support volunteers are all funded by General Fund allocations – just like most other cities. A good move in this direction to determine just what is needed to maintain our parks was taken by Supervisor Matt Gonzalez with his resolution put forward in June to determine the number of gardeners required to provide a high standard of care to each category of park land.

We are at a pivotal moment for park acquisitions and maintenance in San Francisco. We need to step back for a moment, assess where we are and where we need to go, and devise a funding strategy for both acquisition and maintenance that allows us to achieve our vision of beautiful, well-cared for parks and recreation facilities in every neighborhood.

– Isabel Wade, Editor

¹ Pro Parks Levy Project Funding, Seattle Parks and Rec Website

² All data from Peter Harnik, Inside City Parks, Urban Land Institute, 2000

THANK YOU

PARK SUPPORTERS:

Angelina's Deli-Café
Margo Bors
Buena Vista Neighborhood Association
GAP, Inc.
Mary Anne Kayiatos
Amy Leonard-Emory
McGuire Real Estate
Barbara & Chris Wilson

PLAYGROUND SUPPORTERS:

Dorothy Anderson
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Stanley Cordes

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Mary Moore Gaines
Mark Grace
Michael & Kelly Halper
Stephen Horn
Theresa Horrigan
Koret Foundation
Alvin Lam
Chester & Aimee McPhee
Chris and Shaninder Kaur
O'Conner
Nancy Price
Russian Hill Neighbors
San Francisco Federal Credit Union
Beth Steir

REDISCOVER South Park

The Honorable Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr., members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and the Neighborhood Parks Council invite you to

Rediscover South Park, a celebration and festival benefiting our city parks.

*Out of doors in South Park
Thursday, October 9th, 2003
from 6p.m. to 9p.m.*

Festivities Include

- ❖ SILENT AND LIVE AUCTION ❖
- ❖ MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT ❖
- ❖ SLEIGHT-OF-HAND ARTISTS AND MYSTICS ❖
- ❖ CARRIAGE RIDES ❖
- ❖ CHAMPAGNE AND LIBATIONS ❖
- ❖ OYSTERS AND GRILLED MEATS ❖
- ❖ DELICIOUS BITES, ORGANIC DELECTABLES AND SWEET TREATS ❖

Stroll among mystics, musicians, and costumed characters of the late 1800s, while you enjoy a bounty of delectable delights and libations – all under a sparkling canopy of lights.

NPC plays a vital role in promoting the cause of neighborhood parks and improved park management. Continuing our work depends increasingly on the generosity of San Francisco residents and businesses. Funds raised from this event will support our efforts to assist and advocate for all of our neighborhood parks.

**For tickets and information call
Marianne Gabel, NPC, (415) 621-3260 x 106**