



Neighborhood Parks Council
COMMUNITY MEETING MINUTES

Park Town Hall

January 29th, 2011 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
SoMa Recreation Center

I. Welcoming Remarks

a. Meredith Thomas, NPC Executive Director

- i. The purpose of today's meeting is to talk about our parks and recreation in San Francisco. Specifically, to have conversations with park leaders, decision makers, and our neighbors.
- ii. NPC is an independent nonprofit in San Francisco working to make sure our parks are clean, fun and safe. We do this through advocacy work. We ensure your voice is heard by making sure people who make decisions know what you want. NPC encourages the formation of park groups, supports volunteers, and works closely with elected officials regarding policies and legislations the City can adopt to improve the San Francisco park system.
- iii. Meeting ground rules: We will treat each other with respect (see agenda for full rules).
- iv. Format discussion: First, we will each choose the topic we most want to discuss and then spend the bulk of the day having a small group discussion for each topic chosen. Afterwards we will have a representative from each table to gather everyone's thoughts and report to the rest of us their findings.

b. Mark Buell, RPD Commission President

- i. First, let me thank NPC for taking the initiative of having these Park Town Halls. You know it is a successful meeting when we have to set up more chairs and tables.
- ii. In the last seven years, RPD has faced \$43M reduction in General Funds. The challenge for park decision makers is how to make cuts and still give the same quality of life that you want, or how to add revenue to compensate for the losses.
- iii. We (12 RPD employees and 3 commissioners) are here to listen to what you have to say.

c. Phil Ginsburg, RPD General Manager

- i. Good morning and happy Saturday. I'm not going to talk a lot because I want to listen. Thank you for coming—I know everyone here really cares about parks. We don't always agree about whether to turn left, right, or center and we have to make tough choices. The good news is, because of hard work have done in past year, we have been positioning ourselves for a rebound. We're not there yet, but we are on the right path. I look forward to today's conversation.
- ii. Thank you, NPC. One of the most positive things we did last year was strengthen the relationship between RPD and NPC. We count on NPC for advocacy and ideas, as well as for assistance in community engagement.



II. Recreation (table 1)

a. Challenges:

- i. Clubhouses are shuttered and without staff.
- ii. Perception that rented clubhouses may have limited access for community use (community cannot hold meetings, etc.)

b. Solutions:

- i. Allow for cross-rec center and clubhouse programming. Example: Sunnyside community would be willing to have recreation programs offered at Glen Park held in the Sunnyside observatory because there are issues of arsenic and lead at Glen Park Playground.
- ii. Unique staffing at recreation centers or clubhouses where there is staff who are available and know the community.
- iii. Coordinate with “Friends of” groups to activate space.

III. Budget (table 2)

a. Challenges:

- i. General Fund support has been reduced and will happen again.
- ii. RPD cannot change funding sources and what they are used for (open space fun, golf fund, etc). They can only shift the amount of money used and increase revenue.
- iii. Current emphasis on revenue hurts when advocating for stopping the reductions to the General Fund. As RPD begins to increase earned revenue, the city will continue to see it as a place that general funds can be cut from. Increased revenue = decreased general fund support.
- iv. The issue was raised about disparity of money delegated to recreation centers and parks:
 1. RPD scholarship fund exists and has been increased. Process is complicated: barrier. Many kids living in SROs here, won't know how to take advantage of resources.
 2. Scholarships are not a replacement for drop-in, kid access!

b. Solutions:

- i. Change the way we all look at our parks and recreation facilities as a baseline service for the city—like health services or public education. Should we market our recreation and parks as a preventative investment in our futures – the healthier our children and families are, the safer our community can be.
- ii. If you have \$80,000 investment of staffing, maybe that helps to reduce need for more cops.

IV. Safety (table 3, specific to SoMA parks and rec centers)

a. Challenges:

- i. Community based organizations and nonprofits are stretched too thin and need access to more support. They often relied on the rec center for access, with shortened hours and limited staff it is increasingly difficult to offer programs to keep the neighbors feeling safe.
- ii. SoMA has a large number of families, but also faces substance abuse issues.

b. Solutions:

- i. Create stronger RPD/nonprofit partnerships in SoMA:
 1. Secure Victoria Manalo Draves park with RPD staff or partners.
 2. Coordinate sanitation efforts with partners and community.



- ii. Host a meeting between the local school, community leaders and RPD. RPD needs to be part of the conversation with the neighbors to ensure that the parks and rec centers remain safe havens.

V. Natural Areas/Wildlife (table 4)

- a. Goals:
 - i. Increase open space while preserving both native and non-native plants.
 - ii. Balance policies around wildlife and natural areas.
 - iii. Encourage more land acquisition to create wildlife “Green Corridors” with limited human access (trails only).
- b. The group opposes 30’ high water treatment plant at western end of GGP.

VI. Communication/Engagement (table 5)

- a. Challenge:
 - i. Ensure all communities are represented.
 - ii. Access:
 - 1. Language Access to programs offered, times open, etc. RPD should be working towards offering work in several languages, not just in English.
 - 2. Access for those without a computer is limited. People often don’t know what’s happening even through they live only a few blocks away because there are no staff on-site and the community member does not have a computer.
 - iii. Breakdown in communication between the department and community members.
 - iv. RPD blog is a good tool—more info should go out about that. Most have just heard about it.
 - v. Groups don’t know how to access what is on the commission calendar more than a month out (when the agenda is released). How can community members track their issues more effectively?
- b. Solutions:
 - i. Greater outreach at the rec centers to connect community to programs, like having recreation guides at the rec centers.
 - ii. Use non-English newspapers to spread the word about RPD programs and changes.
 - iii. Leverage nonprofit, community group and friends of groups to get the word out about events and changes to RPD’s services.
 - iv. Use the RPD blog and educate community members on how to use it as a tool to reach out to RPD and the commission.
 - v. The RPD Commission could include a timeline on the Commission Agenda for each item or issue being discussed. For example: the budget comes up every January, it should begin to be calendared in November.

VII. Strategic Planning (table 6)

- a. Challenge: There is no clear roadmap to where RPD is going, making the department reactive instead of proactive.
- b. Solutions:



- i. Create three-, five- and ten-year plans that can act as a roadmap for the department, removing the “crisis mode” option for the department.
- ii. Develop master plans and strategic plans for each park by involving the friends of groups, gardening, custodial and executive staff.
- iii. Park Stewardship engagement: RPD should build the community and friends of group into the budget process as they have the knowledge of what will work in their parks and can think creatively.
- iv. Create dedicated revenue through special districts, a ballot measure and be sure to get the mayor’s office on board with the plan.

VIII. Table 7: SOMA Recreation Center Issues

a. Challenges

- i. SoMA Rec is a daily hub for many residents and is the only open space for many residents aside from the park. There needs to be safe public access.
- ii. Community concern about drugs and violence in the recreation center.

b. Solutions

- i. Increase the number of events at the facility, partner with nonprofits to do them (i.e. movie nights, food bank, card nights, etc).
- ii. Have a community art project like a mural to increase pride in the center.
- iii. Open the center on Sundays to increase community access.

IX. Closing Remarks

a. Meredith Thomas, NPC Executive Director

- i. Thanks to the RPD Commission/Staff for partnering with us to do this. NPC staff will post meeting minutes at sfnpc.org and use these discussions to set our advocacy agenda. I am pleased to announce the release of our 2010 Park User Survey Report, which can also be found at sfnpc.org.

b. Mark Buell, RPD Commission President

- i. Thanks again for coming out. It’s like a company—you’re all shareholders who have ideas to help us succeed. Investing now can save money in the future. Need to do better planning so people know where we’re going with each of our facilities. Hard to practice best management under crisis conditions. If we continue to find new revenues the powers that be will cut our funding. Where we want to go is get sustainable funding—get out of the political ups and downs and find a way to do that. People are thinking about this already. You reinforce this with your comments. Thanks to NPC, participants, and RPD staff.

