



Neighborhood Parks Council

Annual Park Group Meeting with Mayor Ed Lee

MEETING MINUTES

March 22, 2010 9:30 AM

City Hall, Room 305

I. Introductory Remarks

Meredith Thomas, NPC Executive Director

- a. Meredith Thomas: Thank you for joining us today for our annual Meeting with the Mayor. This is our chance as advocates to talk directly with leaders of our city. NPC's primary partner is the [Recreation and Park Department \(RPD\)](#) but there are a lot of San Francisco agencies that own/manage land. It is important to talk to the Mayor and his staff directly about our entire park system.

We have captured all questions sent in and given them to the Mayor, his staff, and RPD. We will post the questions and minutes at <http://www.sfnpc.org/meetingminutes2011>. Hard copies will be available upon request.

Before we begin, I want to review NPC's meeting ground rules:

- We treat each other with respect, even when we disagree.
- We stay on topic.
- We intend to develop personal relationships to enhance trust and open communication.
- We value constructive feedback. We will avoid being defensive and give feedback in a constructive manner.
- We emphasize open and honest communication - there are no hidden agendas.
- We de-personalize discussion of issues - no attacks on people.
- One person talks at a time; there are no side discussions.
- We turn off cell phones.
- We arrive on time.
- We end on time.

II. Remarks from Mayor Lee, Commissioner Buell, & General Manager Phil Ginsburg

- a. **Mayor Lee:** Welcome to City Hall. I enjoy meeting all the residents of SF. I've been meeting so many people who give good advice and opinions. Everyone loves the city very much. This is what has affected me, and made me kick into my highest gear. Its worth all the night meetings, round tables, etc. I'm here with Phil Ginsburg, Commissioners Buell, Harrison and Arata, Phil Ting, and my staff, including Hydra Mendoza from the School District Board. Many of your questions have to do with our future, families and kids. I look forward to talking with you about this.

I didn't run for Mayor, I was appointed to administer and manage the city in the best way

I can. I talk to as many people as possible--keep channels open. That's how we get things done. It is less about making new promises and more about fulfilling promises already made in the past. Parks are treasures. We need to make sure everyone enjoys the city as much as they can.

This city, like every US city, is extremely challenged by the economy. We all have to be creative and educate each other on best ideas. I believe in the current direction of the Commission and RPD staff and the public/private partnerships they are creating. We can't exist well on the General Fund alone. Out of 21 years in government, I have learned that the best thing we can do is find partners. This will enhance our ability to run parks and make neighborhoods better.

I want to thank you for everything you do. Your association with NPC, things you do in your neighborhoods, the time you've taken to come to this meeting and talk to me. This is so valuable; that's what makes this city great. I will listen carefully. I will look to Phil Ginsburg and Mark Buell to help answer questions as well.

- b. **Meredith Thomas:** NPC is really excited to have Mayor Lee step into this role. He truly understands the value of park groups and private/public partnerships.
- c. **Commissioner Buell:** Thank you all for coming. The fact that this room is standing room only reflects that everyone cares about parks. Not everyone agrees, but everyone cares passionately. I have two observations: because we live in times of diminishing resources, we've had to make tough decisions. Our primary purpose is to keep parks open, usable, and enjoyed. We are never going to get everything 100% right, but if we listen to the public we'll get closer. Two things we've done: 1) [Park Town Halls](#) 2) Moved to a [sub committee system](#). Subcommittees hear items before they get to full Commission. We'll get all the public input we can before a final decision.
- d. **Phil Ginsburg:** This is now my third Meeting with the Mayor. The partnership with NPC has evolved in such a positive direction over last few years. Everyone here is a passionate advocate. Your partnership is invaluable. We worked together on budget principles, on how to increase rec programming, and you're helping us come up with ballot ideas to create more sustainable funding.

I want to recognize my staff who are here out of respect and a commitment to listen. I have never worked with a more passionate/committed staff. If we think about the big picture, there is a lot going really well in trying times. I was in DC last week advocating for parks. There isn't a single park system that is not facing the same challenges. Parks keep children safe/healthy, attract jobs/investment. We can all advocate for parks locally and on a federal level. They deserve more investment.

III. 2010 In review & 2011 Action Priorities

- a. **Meredith Thomas:** In 2010, [park scores](#) went up for 5th year in row. Parks benefited from an infusion of staff during the 07-08 budget and the Jobs Now program. However, D10 still lowest scoring. We need to be raising the bar for the entire city.

[ParkScan/311](#) tell us that graffiti and vandalism are our top issues. These are optional behaviors. We have got to start to think about how we are using/misusing our parks. Staff are spending way too much time dealing with graffiti/dumping. They should be

spending time on other things! Close second most reported issue was water; we need to focus on sustainability.

We're making progress with our Playground Initiative. The [2010 Playground Report Card](#) showed only 16 failing sites.

NPC launched our [Park User Survey](#) in October 2010. 1400+ people took the time to answer. All want same things. Communication is still a challenge. No one likes to be surprised. Use park groups as portals to neighbors/friends. Post info at parks/online and in different languages.

Started [COF](#) in 2010: bond funds going into community-initiated projects. Also in 2010, NPC hosted a [forum](#) for all supervisor candidates.

2011 Action priorities:

- Convening a Blue Ribbon Panel with SPUR on park financing.
- Implement Rec Councils.
- Execute open space planning: just about done with ROSE. Don't have implementation plan.
- Blue Greenway Brownfield cleanup via an EPA grant NPC secured.
- Elect a park-friendly mayor in Nov.
- NPC Internally: we are working closely with the [San Francisco Parks Trust \(SFPT\)](#): to examine if there is a better way to serve parks. We are investigating what a unified park organization would look like. We're going to ask you what you think at a [coalition meeting on April 14th](#). Join us!

Lastly, we've created a [handout](#) that tracks what progress we've made over the last three years with the Mayor's office. We are working together well. There is a lot to continue to work on.

IV. Park Group Testimonials

- Volunteer Appreciation, Linda Stark Litehiser:** Hi my name is Linda Litehiser and I have been actively involved in park advocacy for over 10 years. Today, I am representing a relatively new group called the McLaren Park Collaborative. We are an umbrella group that hopes, among other goals, to help connect the dots between different existing volunteer efforts at McLaren Park and the adjoining Crocker Amazon Playground

Volunteerism and the passion of our park goers has been a continuing theme in our annual meeting with the Mayor. We recognize and appreciate the inclusion of flexible schedules for new hires, so that weekends and afternoon work is no longer overtime for the Department. We also appreciate the addition of captains who can oversee larger groups and the launch of the apprentice program that will build professional horticulture staff for the Department who have worked along volunteers from the beginning. We look forward to growing the apprentice program and working more with the captain model so more frequent and larger volunteer workdays are possible. This is all great progress.

Despite this steady progress, there is still untapped passion and potential among our volunteers across the City. I estimate that our group at Crocker Amazon alone, with both adult and youth volunteers dedicates over 200 hours per month of their time to improving

our park and the quality of life of all who use it. In the meantime, I believe that it is important that we focus on and appreciate the passion of those volunteers, who despite the challenges, devote their time and energy to our parks. We need to feel like we are working with the Department and that we are respected and appreciated. That we are in fact a “team”.

We are therefore asking to make park volunteers more visible through the use of unique park logo T-shirts, hats, work aprons etc. Also, park groups can be the vehicle to spread the word about our parks. Over the past few months we have been exploring innovative ideas with Kimberly Kiefer, the Director of Volunteer Programs. One such an idea is to create a teen stewardship program possibly called “greenagers”. And perhaps a merit badge award system “park scouts”? This could engage even young children in park volunteer activities.

Park groups are ready and willing to work with the Department to launch a volunteer recognition program. We feel the public needs to know that a lot of work being done in parks today is through “friends” groups—their own neighbors. By recognizing and branding volunteers, we think it will increase excitement and encourage more people to get involved in supporting our parks. Both the Department and the park groups will benefit. We look forward to working with you.

Mr. Mayor, will you support improving volunteer appreciation and visibility for our park system?

- **Mayor Lee:** The answer is yes. I know what volunteers do because I am one. I know that there are hundreds and hundreds of volunteers. You have my support. I have other ideas too. The Mayor’s Office needs to be serious about recognizing and giving support. I think when volunteers are so great, corporations will join too. We should create an even greater partnership with DPW. I’d like to also thank Local 261 for being here. We need to figure out who does what tasks based on skill set. Gardeners shouldn’t be cleaning up dumping/graffiti. I want to register an absolute yes to this question.
- b. **Open Space Planning, Jonathan Rewers:** My name is Jonathan Rewers, I am on the NPC Board of Directors. Open space is the cornerstone to any community’s quality of life – creating safe places to play in a healthy and vibrant environment.

In San Francisco, the Recreation and Open Space Element (ROSE), a part of the City’s General Plan, guides open space development and acquisition for the City.

In 2009, we began a ROSE revision process so that the document can better guide us for the next 25 years. A key part of this process was community input. NPC facilitated more than 20 Community Open Space Workshops in neighborhoods all over the city. More than 400 city residents attended these workshops. After gathering input about the public’s vision for the future of open, NPC worked with the Planning Department, the Recreation and Park Department, other NGO’s and the Mayor’s Office to create a draft of the ROSE. With the environmental review process of the ROSE well on it’s way it is now time to discuss how we make the vision of the ROSE a reality

With planning comes implementation. We should not let this plan be added to a bookshelf but invest our limited resources in identifying the projects, practices, barriers

and solutions that will move the ROSE forward. We have worked to identify the need, but now its time to prioritize, go back to the coalition that made this vision possible and develop an Open Space Action Plan for each district by the end of 2011, which will move us forward effectively and efficiently.

How do we maximize the Open Space System we have today? Infrastructure investment, maintenance, renovation? What are the low-hanging fruit when it comes to connectivity of parkland? How do we provide access to all San Franciscans? These are the questions that need to be answered for each part of the City. For many neighborhoods, residents know what open space improvements and connectivity they want and they know where it should go – now we need to figure out how make real the policies set forth in the ROSE so these improvements happen.

The proposed Action Plan would result in a set of five- and ten-year implementation projects that focus the work of policy makers, City agencies and our open space partners. With major redevelopment projects, including Treasure Island, Park Merced and the Hunters Point Shipyard, this is the moment to set the foundation to build upon when times are again good and resources available. This an investment in our future, in our City and in all of us.

We request \$100,000 in one time funding for the City Planning Department to move forward with this next critical step. This funding would enable the City to partner with neighbors in every district of the City to develop a concrete 5 and 10 year action plan for Open Space by the end of 2011.

Mr. Mayor, will you ensure that the policies set forth in the ROSE are translated into reality with the development an Open Space Action Plan by the end of 2011?

- **Mayor Lee:** I believe in planning. You're looking at person who started capital planning for city. Invited the departments to come under one tent. Which is way we are making improvements. 10-year capital plans have been really important.

I will think about making a commitment to \$100,000. I will definitely take this under consideration. Planning does take resources to get the right people at the table. This year is already a third gone. Let's see what we can accomplish by yearend.

- c. **Strategic Planning, Kate Scanlan:** My name is Kate Scanlan. I am with the Friends of Mt. Lake Park. I have also served on NPC's Steering Committee for five years. When I started volunteering for NPC the outlook for our parks was – honestly – pretty bleak. In the last seven years, the Department has faced a \$43 million reduction in General Funds. With cuts this dramatic, doing more with less is no longer an option. Recreation and Park is short nearly **300** staffers – and this includes a lot of what we call boots on the ground - gardeners, custodians, maintenance staff, and others. The Department's leadership is focused on keeping our parks and recreation facilities minimally functioning with the resources it still has. We appreciate the efforts they have made and continue to work with Mr. Ginsburg and his staff on how best we all make it through this crisis while still providing excellent parks and recreation for the people who live in and visit our city.

While we talk every day about which clubhouses to keep open or to close, none of us has had the time, energy or capacity to ask critical questions, like what do we want from our clubhouses? As a result there is no clear roadmap showing where the Department is

going in the future. But this is critical. We need to free up some capacity and invest some of our time and energy in a strategic vision to support what San Franciscans need and want from their parks and recreation centers and to help Rec and Park act on those plans rather than just triaging from year to year to keep the parks mowed and the trash collected from week to week.

Mr. Mayor, you could help NPC, Rec and Park – and our City, accomplish this by allocating some of your office's resources to strategic planning. Your Mayor's Office staff could play two vital roles in this important process. First, Mayor's Office staff would bring fresh reinforcements to the Department to support the planning efforts we all want to do but – to be honest – we run out of time for. Second, your staff could be an important channel of communication to all of San Francisco's elected officials who should all be part of this process. Strategic planning for our parks and open spaces impacts everyone in our City and goes beyond just Rec and Park to include other land-managing agencies such as DPW and the Port. All of our elected officials need to be part of the vision for what our parks and open spaces will be in the future.

Mr. Mayor, in addition to allocating some of your staff to craft a long-term strategic plan for our parks and recreation centers for the Department to implement we need something equally important but a lot less tangible. We need the leadership of the Mayor's Office to help insulate these long-term strategic plans from political shifts.

For too many years, parks have been the forgotten step-child in our fairy tale city, getting the short end of the stick every time a budget cut comes around. We need decision-makers to see our parks and recreation facilities as the beauty that they are - vital parts of our city -- as important as health services and public education.

In closing, I call your attention to a Blue Ribbon Panel SPUR will be launching shortly in partnership with NPC to develop recommendations on long-term stable funding sources for our parks system. We ask the Mayor's Office to support the implementation of the recommendations of the panel once developed. Let's stop treating our parks as the Cinderella step-child constantly at the mercy of our city's rapidly changing politics and policies and give them what they deserve – a stable long term future. The Department needs and deserves sustainable and consistent annual funding streams and to remain a priority at City Hall. Maybe then we'll all live here happily ever after.

- **Mayor Lee:** I think part of the question is similar to the last. I do want to commit to planning. Planning is something we have to do. I'm doing that with the budget now. We're no longer into year-to-year budgets. Need 5-year budgets. And 10-year planning.

I will definitely look at Blue Ribbon panel suggestions. I am re-tooling the Mayor's Office as we speak to build more capacity. You've given me some ideas of how that could be part of this agenda. We already have a group of individuals who are committed, I want to use their talents to recreate my office so we can all work in a steady fashion, out of politics. I don't have all details yet, but I am willing to give up parts of the Mayor's Office to ensure that the city works better.

- **Phil Ginsburg:** RPD can't only be reactive. We need forward thinking 3, 5, 10 years. We commit to engage in this planning process. Already the 10-year capital

plans are a good tool as is the 2003 strategic plan.

- **Commissioner Buell:** This really resonates with me. Especially because of the NPC/SFPT conversations going on now. Nothing gives a clearer message to philanthropists than a long-term strategic plan that wouldn't be as influenced by political ups and downs. We need that vision to get increased financial support.

V. Audience Q & A with Mayor Lee

- a. **Geoffrea Morris, Parks 94124:** Our group has adopted 11 parks in the Bayview and Silver Terrace. We hope to improve these parks, promoting social change and quality of life. There is nothing to do for kids in the Bayview. One thing you can do right now is help us plan a Family Day at Hilltop Park on June 12th when Sunday Streets is planned. This will build up the idea of taking over your park in Bayview. Parks promote quality of life. You can always take your kids to the park even if you are broke. More funding is needed in the southeast sector of San Francisco.
 - **Mayor Lee:** Thanks for coming to represent the southeast sector. Yes. I would like to make sure that Sunday Streets is inclusive of everyone. Let's plan that Family Day together and create more linkages. Let's do it. This seems easy and fun to do.
- b. **Art Chang, Friends of Washington Square Park:** You mentioned the public/private partnerships. I like this. RPD is perceived as revenue generating like the airport, but it isn't. Don't forget that the public is an important part of this. I would like to know to what extent can the public participate in these partnerships?
 - **Mayor Lee:** Partnerships have existed for many, many years in many forms. Partnerships should increase participation from the public and shouldn't smell of privatization. Privatization means we've given it away. Partnerships should do the opposite: enhanced resources, allow it to become more accessible by more people. We get into weeds, but any smart investor will want to know how the money is being spent and how the City will match it. Also, who maintains new things?
 - **Phil Ginsburg:** This is an issue that is important to evolve the conversation around. Example of public/private partnerships: City Fields Foundation has helped provide 60,000 extra hours of field time for kids. RPD partnered with SFPT to improve the conservatory of flowers. Another example is the senior programming at Portsmouth Square. One thing we want to do is ensure that gifts are well cared for. The idea of leveraging is great. There is a lot of opportunity for public/private partnerships.
- c. **Art Persyko, Friends of Lafayette Park:** Many agencies are suffering. I think we need a citywide solution. Thirty-eight of the wealthiest people in the US live in SF. Let's have the very wealthy pay more taxes.
 - **Mayor Lee:** If I knew those wealthy people I would make those calls. We can't tax our way out of this. We need to work with companies to make sure we have jobs. If you have money leaders who haven't contributed, I'll work with Phil Ting on this. I have no problem collecting what we're due.

- d. **Barbara Fugate, Cayuga Improvement Association:** Cayuga/McLaren. Cayuga clubhouse is under construction. I'd like to see something in writing regarding the leasing policy as it seems to keep changing. Also, more participation from associations is needed.

My second question comes from McLaren Park: Please look into the lack of plumbers, electricians, etc. on site at McLaren. McLaren is so large that it needs on-site experts.

- **Mayor Lee:** If we do have these public/private agreements, they need to be transparent and spell out what they are giving and what we are giving.
- **Phil Ginsburg:** We have 178 buildings including restrooms/pools. We have shifted our recreation model, adding 20,000 hours of programming. Neighborhood facilities are a challenge. We need to identify community partners that are consistent with our mission to provide programming. We want to create vibrant, open, safe, active spaces. Out of 42 clubhouses, 24 operate free programming now. 6-7 tuition based preschools. Working on remaining spaces. We are working with the Rec. and Park Commission. Three strategies: 1) neighborhood identifies a partner, 2) we identify potential partners, 3) we work together to find funding to allow RPD to provide programming.

Ideally RPD would operate all 42 clubhouses ourselves. We promise to work with the Cayuga community to identify a solution.

- e. **Paul Nixon, Bay Access:** SF Bay is our largest open space. America's Cup is coming. People are going to be thinking differently about recreation, and RPD needs to plan for this. Since there is more demand for swimming, water safety and boating, what is RPD doing in terms of planning? How are you getting non-swimmer groups and minorities into the process?

- **Mayor Lee:** This is wonderful opportunity to be hosting (America's Cup). Absolutely right, everyone needs to find a way to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Take a visionary look at what the City can do (with Buell) working with Sophie Maxwell. We are making sure that the traditionally left out communities can find a connection. We want the use of waterways to reach every neighborhood, particularly those who are traditionally unfamiliar with them.
- **Commissioner Buell:** Nothing pleases me more than support of the Mayor on this. David Lewis (Save the Bay) and Sophie Maxwell co-chair committee on this. Swimming is a barrier to sailing we are working with RPD on swimming lessons.

- f. **Denis Mosgofian, Keep Arboretum Free:** At Golden Gate Park, we appreciate your privatization vs. partnership description. The arboretum has had a fee for one year. Very little money has been raised because of a drop in visits. Why did you move to make fee permanent?

- **Mayor Lee:** This was primarily a financial consideration. The distinction between resident and non-resident was one I wanted to experiment with. We will study this. I'm not going to charge residents. If it doesn't work, we will reconsider. We've had a similar arrangement at Harding Park where non-residents are subsidizing residents.

- **Phil Ginsburg:** This is one of those tough choices. Japanese Tea Garden raises \$2M/year in non-resident fees. This could fund 25 staffers. We don't want to charge people. We're looking for sustainable revenue. These are tough choices that are worth a shot. We have no interest in charging SF residents to access the garden.

g. **Lisa Zahner, Alamo Square Neighborhood Association:** Alamo Square Neighborhood Association is thinking about revenue for the city. Alamo Square is a major tourist destination, but there are no dedicated spaces for the tour buses to park. They block traffic and the 21-Hayes Muni bus stop and create traffic jams. The MTA wants to eliminate one bus stop, and it makes sense to create tour bus parking. Charge a small amount per tour bus. How do we make this happen?

- **Mayor Lee:** Submit that proposal to MTA and I'll back it.

I need to leave. Sorry I didn't get to every question. I have them and promise to give answers to you. This was enjoyable. Keep it up! Even if we have different opinions we will all come out respecting each other. I'm not making new promises. I'm not running for Mayor. As you determine the next mayor, ask candidates, "Are you willing to sacrifice everything to make our city great?"

- **Phil Ginsburg:** I want to thank NPC and SFPT and my staff. Thank you all for coming.