

Joint Stakeholder Meeting Minutes



Neighborhood Parks Council



SAN FRANCISCO
PARKS TRUST

Thursday, April 14, 2011 ~ 6:00 – 8:00 PM
SPUR Urban Center, 654 Mission Street

Background:

Within the context of increasing demand for services and scarcity of resources, a vision has been building at both SFPT and NPC to more fully meet the City-wide needs of parks and park users. This vision is to ensure that volunteerism, civic engagement, advocacy, and philanthropy are coordinated and leveraged for the best possible outcome for parks and park users. Through coalition-driven policy and action, a new organization, based on some of the best practices of both organizations and those around the country, can better ensure that the needs of parks and all park users are equitably met. This new organization can eliminate duplication of efforts and achieve economies of scale, while working efficiently and with inspiration toward an enduring vision for San Francisco parkland for generations to come.

Welcome and Agenda Review

Meredith Thomas, NPC Executive Director

Karen Kidwell, SFPT Executive Director

Glenn Snyder, SFPT Board Chair

Kelly Quirke, NPC Board Chair

The Vision: A New Parks Organization for San Francisco

Power Point Presentation by Kelly Nice, SFPT Board Member and Isabel Wade, NPC Founder and Board Member

<please see the Power Point Presentation at sfnpc.org/meetingminutes2011>

Q and A

Q and A session with the audience and Kelly Nice/Isabel Wade

Question 1: I ask that there be consideration or emphasis on advocating for more public dollars. Talking about real maintenance and operations, the real need seems to be what we do after we spend those capital dollars.

Answer: Both organizations are currently working on ensuring sustainable funding for parks, including maintenance dollars.

Question 2: I'm confused about what you're actually going to do. Are you going to live in one house? Who gives up their office? How will everything come together?

Answer: These details are still being figured out by Board members from both organizations.

Question 3: Will the old groups dissolve?

Answer: Not sure yet. It isn't a merger; it is creating a new organization for San Francisco with the best features of both groups and moving forward. We are also looking nationally to get best practices about what these groups are doing.

Question 4: Is Isabel still going to have punch at the Holiday Party?

Answer: Yes

Question 5: The word "recreation" is not up there much. I would like to have that pushed more clearly.

Answer: This is not an oversight. The word "parks" encompasses the "rec and park" aspect. It's a long word that doesn't read well. We will continue with certain recreation-oriented programs and projects that we have had and are looking at new recreational opportunities we might want to be involved in as well.

Question 6: How is the new org going to respond to issues around open space acquisition? What will the relationship of the new organization be with PROSAC?

Answer: One of the key areas for NPC is making sure every neighborhood has adequate open space. PROSAC is comprised of citizens who interact with the Commission in an official capacity. Both interact with the Commission and with Rec and Park. We will still be pushing the same goal of providing good open space in every neighborhood. In these tough times we have to be creative in how we're going to get this money to do the acquisition and to pay for the maintenance. We are definitely concerned and will still be involved with this issue.

Question 7: Have you presented this to rec and park?

Answer: No, we have not. We are going to be a very independent organization. We haven't shared more than the green paper that is being shared with you all.

Meredith Thomas: This is only the beginning of the details. There is a lot of merit to this idea of creating a new org but it still needs work. Tonight's conversation will be talking about what it will look like. How could a new park org serve you and what do we need to pay attention to?

Small Break-out Groups

Break-out groups brainstormed answers to the following questions (a, b, and c). The following is a collection of their main ideas.

a. What are the characteristics of an ideal park support group? What are your hopes for a unified park, open space and recreation organization?

- Outreach to get community input
- Passion and skills amongst staff and board
- Accessibility to community members

- Training and seminars for community members to foster stewardship
- Create a large, respected organization that civic leaders respond to and seek advice from
- Bring civil discourse to tough questions
- More planned activities
- Keep community involved
- Greater resources to accomplish mission
- Guerrilla gardening (flash mob style) for maintenance
- Enable volunteers (genuine partnerships)
- Public education about parks (Critical Grass)
- Utilize think tank resources (reports, monthly talks, national park speakers)
- Turn maintenance into gardening which is a more appealing term these days
- Broad-based membership- serve ordinary people citywide, geographic equity
- Open space acquisition- focus on where it is needed
- New codes to ensure real open space acquisition (i.e. get more than balconies)
- Focus on transparency (public agencies)
- Independent of Rec and Park
- Work with all private and public agencies with open space responsibilities
- Have expertise
- Long term keeper of vision
- Best practices and Gov't org. structure in managing parks and open space
- Advocacy- Vehicle for public to express needs, fight for public funding, fight for structural change.
- Independent and partnership with Gov't
- More respect for wildlife
- More funds and programs
- Advocate for accountability in outreach and communications to give the public time to have a voice
- Lead in ballot measures for funding, good governance and policy for parks
- Focus on long term maintenance, operations with a funding plan
- Support maintaining natural areas in San Francisco
- Advocate at the State and Federal level for urban park systems, i.e. policy and funding
- See Golden Gate Park as a unique and special program of focus
- Have an involved Board of Directors in the programs, advocacy and well-informed about "on the ground" operations for effective advocacy and policy development
- Keep fiscal sponsorship rates reasonable (variable rates based on needs)
- Education and sharing best practices for new groups
- Small funding opportunities to catalyze new groups
- Be highly visible in the community
- Maintain good relationships with decision makers
- Board representation from each neighborhood
- Strong volunteer program- website where people can post needs and sign up for opportunities
- Dog policy and enforcement committee
- Advocate and hold elected officials accountable
- Address Port parks
- Work more closely with Friends of the Urban Forest to maintain new trees
- Catalyze new park stewards to watch over every park
- Value the needs of all community members
- Stronger advocacy voice
- Independent from city
- Consensus builder
- Match philanthropy (funds) to appropriate projects

- Be the watchdog to influence the city to adopt citywide land management/acquisition plan
- Increase strength and services offered

b. What questions do you have about such an organization?

- How long will it take to form?
- Will there be board/staff members left behind?
- How will other community groups view the new org?
- How will the new Executive Director be selected?
- Will the new org further existing and new partnerships?
- What are the benefits of combining the orgs and what makes it stronger?
- Will there be any financial savings?
- 1+1=5, is that really going to happen?
- Will there be conflicts and contradictions?
- Will there be tensions between cultures of organizations (watchdog/advocacy and fundraising/support)?
- How will this work in regards to who will dominate, programs, and size?
- How will funds be controlled and distributed?
- How do small groups fit into this vision?
- What are the benefits of merging?
- How do we ensure that donors trust giving to an org that questions the city?
- How do we resolve issues related to the use of recycled/artificial turf (use of recycled waste and safety of recycled materials)

c. What are your concerns regarding a meta-park and open space organization?

- Small parks will get lost
- Not enough representation of the diverse community and their thoughts and concerns
- Equity and advocacy
- Taking specific positions on challenging issues
- Loss of voice could occur
- Listening at neighborhood level could be lost
- Desire to keep independence of ideas/diversity
- Vision won't be reality. Bigger doesn't equal better
- Philanthropy focus may not be the same as what public wants
- Small groups won't have access to new org
- Bigger org may make transparency more difficult
- Afraid of losing independence from Rec and Park (via NPC)
- Fear of privatization
- Accessibility to org may decrease
- Work on Blue Greenway might be put on hold
- People getting laid off
- Fiscal fees increasing
- Combining means a monopoly and that smaller/quieter voices won't be heard
- Could be an "arm" of RPD
- Money goes to RPD w/out restrictions

Closing Remarks and Next Steps

Closing remarks by Meredith Thomas and audience

Meredith Thomas: Thank you for having the conversation with us tonight and for the amazing ideas. There are some things we haven't gotten to yet in our joint discussions about the new

organization that are expressed here on paper, so this is very helpful. Tonight is the first chance where we've looked at where we go with this vision through a community lens. We are going to take in your feedback and create the next version of our vision so that it can truly reflect community needs.

Lynne Newhouse-Segal: Congratulations on presenting such a clear picture of how you two organizations will work together. Whenever I've been involved with either org, it's been a good experience. There is a big commonality in interests—This can only be a good thing.

Maria Morgan-Butcher: I don't want smaller parks to get lost in the big picture.

Isabel Wade: Our group wanted to express the need to have fun in the parks: two potential fun ideas came up: Guerilla Gardening, and a periodic park event Critical Grass (inspired by the SF Bicycle Coalition's Critical Mass)

Fran Martin: Doing something like SPUR does with research and presentations but for open space and green concepts, maybe even infiltrating SPUR in some way. And dealing with development issues in Southeast.

Kristine Enea: Never lose focus on the need for advocacy (treating open space as public space). Advocacy and visibility for user groups is important.

Unknown: I always think about the people and the big users. I would like to see consideration for wildlife. There is nowhere for these creatures to go. We don't give wildlife very much consideration

Jim Warshell: You're both wonderful orgs and have a lot to be proud of. However, you two are coming from very different cultures and program orientations. Fundraising and Advocacy are really different. It's going to be challenging and interesting.

Bill Wilson: I am concerned about the independence. I am not utterly convinced that there needs to be one organization that can do it all.

Meredith Thomas: The following were big ideas that surfaced tonight: geographic and socioeconomic equity, thoughtful policy processes, emphasis on transparency, accessibility to users and supporters, fears of loss of passion towards the neighborhood level, staying independent, funding from all levels of government for parks, and ensuring that future generations are given parks.

- Presents possible names for new org for feedback:
 - San Francisco Parks Alliance
 - San Francisco Parks Council
 - San Francisco ParkWorks
 - San Francisco ParksSpace
 - **Please submit feedback and/or additional suggestions to sfnpc.org/feedback**