

GREEN ENVY

ACHIEVING EQUITY IN OPEN SPACE



A REPORT PREPARED BY
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS COUNCIL

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*"Parks are many things, but above all parks are about equality."
--Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor, Bogota, Colombia*

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INTRODUCTION

Any city dweller can tell you that parks and green spaces provide an essential contribution to the quality of life we expect in a world-class city. For some, open space is about running trails, playgrounds, or a place to walk the dog. For others, the availability of nature in a jungle of concrete and asphalt is a mental and physical life preserver. Behavioral research has shown that the opportunity to experience nature in our lives is a necessary requirement for human beings to function effectively.¹

San Francisco's unique topography, hilly terrain with land surfaces ranging from coastal scrub to rocky outcroppings, makes open space development a particular challenge. With 739,426 people living on a peninsula of 49 square miles, the "City by the Bay" is second only to New York City in population density among American cities. Because of these geographic limitations, city planners in San Francisco face even greater challenges to preserve open parcels than planners in many other cities.

In 1974, San Francisco voters passed the visionary Proposition J, which allocated a small percentage of property taxes to establish an Open Space Fund. The Fund's purpose was to provide money for acquiring property for new parks and open space development. As much as forty percent of this fund could be used for maintenance of newly acquired and developed parks. Over the years this original Fund has been extended several times; the current Fund is scheduled to continue through 2031.

Despite the intent of city residents, San Francisco has fallen short on open space acquisition. Several reasons have contributed to this shortfall. First, the original intent of the legislation has been subverted by "borrowing" money to support ongoing Recreation and Park Department (RPD) operations. Second, the definition of Open Space Fund property qualifying for maintenance funds has been stretched beyond the original intent. Third, land values in the City have increased at an unprecedented rate, and the available funds did not enable major land acquisition. Fourth, the City has not been sufficiently proactive, creating an inventory of available land. Finally, social challenges, such as the need to create more affordable housing, have in some cases been given a higher priority than parks when making land use decisions.

Now that the city has committed funding to assemble an Open Space Task Force, it is our hope that the Task Force will develop a rigorous plan, and an implementation and funding strategy for acquiring open space both in new and existing neighborhoods. Representatives from the Recreation and Park Department, City Planning, Public Utilities Commission, Redevelopment Agency, the Port Authority, the Unified School District, the Mayor's Office, and the Department of Public Works must all contribute to this planning effort in order to assure adequate access to parks and open space for all San Francisco residents.

¹ Erica Rex, "Urban Renewal," *Forest Magazine*, Fall 2002, pg. 40-41

Neighborhood Parks Council has revised this report, first published in 2003, for the Open Space Task Force. This report provides detailed research to support the planning activity. Inside you will find:

- 1) The history of San Francisco's early open space acquisition and development
- 2) An outline of the economic, social and health benefits of urban parks
- 3) A gap analysis of the existing park and recreation facility system using geographic information system (G.I.S.) technology and comparative category analysis
- 4) A gap analysis of two categories of open space, neighborhood parks and playgrounds, in four of the city's many open-space deficient districts.
- 5) A history of open space legislation, acquisition and funding in San Francisco from 1974 through 2006
- 6) An examination of acquisition programs in other cities to glean best practices.

The title of this report, *Green Envy*, was chosen for its multiple meanings. At present, San Francisco has 'green envy' of other cities that have programs in place to protect and acquire open space. Within San Francisco many neighborhoods that are deficient in open space have 'green envy' of other neighborhoods that have more parks. But these deficiencies can be overcome with a new Open Space Plan -- then San Francisco's parks and green spaces could be the 'envy' of all.

A HISTORY OF OPEN SPACE IN SAN FRANCISCO

THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

By Jeanne Alexander²

Open space has been prized and pursued in the city for over 150 years. In 1854, a writer in the *Annals of San Francisco*, lamented that in the projected plan for the city, “*There seems no provision made for a public park—the true ‘lungs’ of a large city. Portsmouth Square, and other two or three diminutive squares (Union Square, Washington Square) seem the only breathing holes intended for the future population of hundreds of thousands. This is a strange mistake and can only be attributed to the jealous avarice of the city projectors in turning every square vara (32-43 inches-ed.) of the site to an available building lot.*”

Parks were no part of city planning in the early days of building San Francisco. In 1868 “an editorial in the *San Francisco Daily Bulletin* declared, “*As the few vacant lots fill up, and wood buildings are replaced with lofty bricks, the want of clear sky space will become more than ever felt.*”

THE FIRST PARKS

The rudimentary build-up of San Francisco, in the 1860s, ended near Divisadero Street. All the area beyond was known as the Outside Lands. They consisted mostly of sand dunes and covered some 14,000 acres, populated by fiercely dug-in and protective homesteaders. In response to the growing demand for a large public park, in 1868 the Board of Supervisors established the Outside Lands Committee to settle disputes with the settlers and free the land for city use. Committee members C.H. Stanyan, A.J. Schrader, R. Beverly Cole, Monroe Ashbury and Charles Clayton negotiated compromises that, in addition to land for such city facilities as a hospital, library, and jail, included setting aside 1013 acres for Golden Gate Park, 36 acres for Buena Vista Park, 20 acres for Mountain Lake Park, 200 acres for a cemetery, later to become Lincoln Park and Fort Miley, and 15 1/2 acres for public squares. For their services the Outside Lands Committee presented the supervisors a bill for \$50,000 which was discounted in court to \$10,500, awarding each claimant \$2,100 instead of the \$10,000 sought. And as compensation for the damage to pocketbook and pride, each of the eminent gentlemen had a street named after him. A more lasting reward than the money.

In April 1870, the California State Legislature passed an act “To Provide for the Improvement of Public Parks in San Francisco.” It was the final step in the long fight to gain a large park for San Francisco and the first official mention of the name Golden Gate Park. The act also authorized Governor Henry Haight to establish a Park Commission and appoint three unpaid commissioners, whose selection of John McLaren as Superintendent of Parks in 1887 jump-started the development of open

² Jeanne Alexander is the historical columnist for NPC’s newsletter, *Parks Report*; she was previously the Executive Editor of KQED’s program guide *Focus*.

space in the city. McLaren expanded Golden Gate Park, connected it to the Presidio and Mountain Lake by the Park-Presidio Boulevard Parkway, developed the drive and park on Telegraph Hill, created municipal golf courses and parkway drives at Lincoln Park and Harding Park, zoological gardens and the children's area and swimming pool at Fleishhacker, and established the Excelsior/ Visitacion Valley park which bears his name.

A new "home rule" charter in 1900 increased the Park Commission to five members, appointed by the mayor and put all the city's small parks and squares under Commission jurisdiction. Between 1900 and 1940 the park system expanded greatly. Balboa and Mission Park were added; 150 acres of the old City Cemetery were acquired and renamed Lincoln Park and Bayview Park was dedicated in 1915. Land was acquired for Aquatic Park, smaller parks were landscaped and planted as neighborhood open spaces; and McCoppin Square was landscaped and tennis courts and a children's playground were installed. Many of San Francisco's neighborhood parks are, in fact, the result of the city removing all cemeteries in 1914 except for that at Mission Dolores.

Citizens swarmed into their new open spaces, prompting the Commission to issue an ordinance in 1918 establishing rules of outdoor behavior that, among other things, prohibited "letting loose of cattle, goats or swine; bathing in ponds; or appearing in attire exposing legs, arms or trunk, except at athletic grounds."

THE FIRST PLAYGROUNDS

Those athletic grounds -- read playgrounds -- got off to a later start. In 1898, the first playground was created by the California Club, a women's organization, on school property at Bush and Hyde Streets. Its success moved the Board of Supervisors to appropriate funds to the Board of Education to lease land and equip a playground at Seventh and Harrison Streets and in 1904 a \$740,000 bond issue was passed for Father Crowley and North Beach Playgrounds. In 1907 a charter amendment established the Playground Commission giving it jurisdiction over properties controlled by other departments or purchased by the Board of Supervisors.

In 1926, Josephine Randall was appointed first Superintendent of Recreation and a member of the Commission, which, two years later, was renamed the Recreation Commission. During her 25-year tenure, Randall expanded her department's facilities from 22 playgrounds to over 100 recreation units, including Camp Mather in the High Sierra. In 1928 a proposed bond issue of \$3,100,000 to finance a system of recreation areas was defeated. Randall continued to lobby for funding, formulating and campaigned relentlessly for a \$12,000,000 Recreation Bond that was finally put on the ballot more than 20 years later in 1949. This time it passed.

Because both the Recreation Commission and the Park Commission dealt with the same services, the two were merged in 1950, becoming the Recreation and Park Department, managed by the Recreation and Park Commission.

RENOVATION FUND AND OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

It took a quarter of a century for citizens to become concerned again about expanding parks and recreation facilities in those neighborhoods still lacking open space. The Board of Supervisors, at the initiation of open space advocates, put a charter amendment on the ballot in 1974 to create a fund to support acquisition and development of new parkland. The Open Space Fund set aside a portion of the revenue from city property tax to purchase open space (2.5 cents per \$100 of assessed value), to acquire property for recreation facilities, and to develop and maintain the new parks.

The Charter Amendment also established what would become the first of three successive Citizens Advisory Committees. The Prop J Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC), formed as an advisory group to the General Manager of the Recreation and Park Department, and consisted of 23 members- two named by each supervisor (one was to come from a list of organizations involved in environmental preservation); one member was appointed by the mayor. The voters approved a second version of the Open Space Fund in 1988. This time, a portion of the Fund was diverted for children's after-school programs, other recreational programs and program administration.

The original OSAC members chose one of three committees they wanted to work on: High Needs-- neighborhoods without adequate facilities—the Tenderloin, Western Addition, Chinatown, the Mission, Hunters Point, South of Market; WHO—waterfront, hilltop, other sites; Renovation- making up for years of neglect of both facilities and landscapes. Along with RPD staff serving the Committee, they heard proposals and funding requests from citizens (some of them friends), selected and made field trips to the sites, discussed their findings and distributed start-up awards. Groups could pool their committed funds, and many returned year after year trying to secure the full amount needed for their project. This process of “banking” made acquisition and development of many sites a time consuming, drawn out affair stretching as long as 20 years. In addition, the process served the “squeaky wheels” best, generally better educated, middle class residents who knew how to work the system.

FROM FEAST TO FAMINE

From its inception in 1974, until its third renewal in 2000, the Open Space Fund was responsible for adding over 80 acres of park and properties for recreation facilities to the park system. During this time period, the fund provided more than \$300 million to the Recreation and Park Department, a veritable pot of gold for any city department. Of this total, voters may be surprised to learn that only \$24 million was actually spent on acquisition of property. Another \$47 million was spent on facility development and renovation. The lion's share of Open Space funding has, over the years, become earmarked for operating costs and program administration.

The original language of the charter amendment did, to be sure, authorize a percentage of the fund to be applied toward maintenance of the new parks and properties acquired. However, periodic budget crises over the years inspired a new interpretation of the charter language: any RPD facility where OSF funds had been spent for capital improvements also became eligible for ongoing maintenance paid for by the Fund. In addition to the shift of a greater portion of the Open Space Fund to cover standard maintenance, other programs and operating costs were absorbed by the fund, reducing further the amount available for acquisition and development of new property. This included a Volunteer Program, the Natural Areas Program, and the Urban Forestry Program, as well as the salaries for many of the “maintenance yard” staff that provided necessary plumbing, carpentry, and custodial services. As necessary or valuable as all of these programs and services have been to the department, by the late 1990’s, more than sixty percent of the Open Space Fund was directed toward general operating costs (gardeners and recreation directors) as opposed to capital costs (bricks and mortar, vacant land). The feast had turned to a famine by the turn of the new century as far as the city’s capacity to develop new parks or replace dilapidated facilities.

IMPORTANCE OF PARKS

Many of the environmental benefits that green spaces bring to cities are well known. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and reduce the urban heat island effect — no small benefit in light of global warming trends. The flora of parks provides shade, reduces wind, absorbs rain and curbs runoff, cleans the air, and fights soil erosion. Urban parks provide much-needed habitat for hundreds of species of insects, birds and animals. However, much less is known about the significant economic, social, and both physical and mental health benefits of parks and open space in cities. This chapter provides a brief overview of the extensive research that has identified and evaluated these benefits.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Recent research demonstrates that residential properties located near green spaces have a higher market value than those further away. This in turn leads to an increase in property taxes paid by the homeowners. This observation, which Dr. John Crompton, the leading expert in the economics of parks and recreation³, calls “The Proximity Principle,” is supported by over thirty modern studies. A meta-analysis of these studies shows that *well-maintained* parks enhance surrounding property values. The study found a positive impact of 20% on property values abutting or fronting a passive park area. While the impact of the park was somewhat lower moving away from a park, there was still a positive effect on property values two to three blocks away.⁴ An earlier study examining the impact of greenbelts on property values in Boulder, Colorado found that the value of homes bordering a new greenbelt decreased \$10.20 for every foot away from the open space.⁵ In addition, a 2001 survey for the National Association of Realtors found that fifty percent of respondents stated that they would be willing to pay 10% more for a property located close to a park or open space. See reference #6

Often this increase in property taxes is large enough to quickly pay off the cost required to purchase the open space.⁶ In Boulder, Colorado, the \$500,000 annual increase in proximate property taxes that resulted from the creation of the greenbelt enabled the \$1.5 million purchase price to be paid off in just three years.⁷

³ Dr. Crompton is a Distinguished Professor of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University

⁴ Crompton, John, “The Proximity Principle: The Impact of Parks, Open Space and Water Features on Residential Property Values and the Property Tax Base,” 2nd edition. National Recreation and Park Association, 2004.

⁵ Correll, Lillydahl and Singell. (1978). “The Effects of Greenbelts on Residential Property Values: Some Findings on the Political Economy of Open Space”. *Land Economics*, 54:2 207-217

⁶Not surprisingly, Crompton explains that parks and open space can have a negative effect on surrounding housing values if the park is not properly maintained, if it is too secluded to discourage deviant behavior, or if the park is so popular that foot traffic and noise become a nuisance to neighbors.

⁷ Sherer, Paul M. “The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space”, The Trust For Public Land, 2006, page 16.

San Francisco benefits handsomely from our own city parks. Two local studies exemplify the impact San Francisco's parks have on property values. A 1993 study of properties adjacent to Golden Gate Park found that the park is responsible for \$500 million to \$1 billion of the market value of real estate within walking distance of the park. This value generates \$5 to \$10 million per year in property tax revenue for the city.⁸ A subsequent study conducted by the Neighborhood Parks Council found that, city-wide, residential properties within 3 blocks of a park saw a 15.7% premium in their property values compared to properties further away.⁹

Commercial properties near new and well-maintained parks often see an increase in property values as well. The restoration of Bryant Park in New York City provides a good example. After a twelve-year renovation, this park was reopened in 1992. No longer a haven for drug addicts, the park was reborn as a vital midtown oasis where employees gather for weekday lunches in outdoor cafes, and friends assemble on summer evenings for open-air movies. A study by Ernst and Young reported that rents in office buildings surrounding the park increased 115 to 225 percent in the years 1990 to 2000. The same survey also studied property values near 36 other neighborhood parks across New York City and found that "commercial asking rents, residential sale prices, and assessed values for properties near a well-improved park generally exceeded rents in surrounding submarkets."¹⁰

In addition to increasing property values, cities with an excellent parks system find it easier to attract and retain businesses, because companies in the high-tech and research and development industries are less tied to a specific place to run their businesses or set up their corporate headquarters, and therefore have more control over where to locate or relocate. A major factor in where these workers choose to live is the area's quality of life. In 1998, a survey of 1200 high-tech workers found that the quality of life of a community increased the attractiveness of a job by 33%.¹¹ *Because of this trend, cities now have a greater responsibility to create cities with a high quality of life.*

A study conducted by Dr. Crompton in Colorado was able to separate the value of parks from the quality of life issues in attracting businesses. Crompton et al surveyed 174 businesses that had been started, relocated, and expanded in the state from 1992 to 1997. In addition to citing quality of life as the single most important attribute they considered, more than 80% of the respondents included some dimension of parks, open space, or ambience as critically important to the decision-making process.¹²

⁸ Spickard, Steven. (18 May 1993). "The Value of Parks". Testimony before the California Assembly Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife.

⁹ Edwards, Karin. (2007). "Do Parks Make Cents? An Analysis of the Economic Value of Parks in San Francisco". Goldman School of Public Policy

¹⁰ NY4P and Ernst and Young (2003). "How Smart Park Investment Pays Its Way",

¹¹ The Perryman Group. (December 2006). "Sunshine, Soccer, and Success: An Assessment of the Impacts of Municipal Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs on Business Activity in Texas". Waco, Texas

¹² Crompton, John. (2007). "Competitiveness: Parks and Open Space as Factors Shaping a Location's Success in Attracting Companies, Labor Supplies, and Retirees".

Parks are also a popular attraction for tourists. New York's Central Park attracts more tourists each year than all of Washington, D.C. Riverwalk Park has become the most popular tourist attraction in San Antonio, surpassing the Alamo.¹³ In San Francisco, Golden Gate Park is among the favorite destinations of tourists visiting the city. Forty percent of tourists in San Francisco reported visiting Golden Gate Park.¹⁴ In addition, over 1.5 million people visit Alcatraz every year.¹⁵ While admission is free to most urban public parks, tourists spend big bucks in cafes and souvenir kiosks within parks, on programs, performances and festivals held in parks, and at nearby hotels, restaurants and retail shops. The city of Flagstaff, Arizona supports acquisition of open space with taxes from such tourist activities, while the state of Texas and Florida partially fund their state parks with a sales tax on sporting goods.

Retirees are another potential income source that are attracted by parks and recreational facilities. This demographic is an increasing percentage of the population, as the "Baby Boomers" are now reaching retirement age. Retirees often have the flexibility to relocate in their later years, and they often are attracted to areas that offer significant recreational options. In a recent lecture at City Hall, Dr. Crompton warned that retirees are currently moving in greater numbers to states such as Texas and Illinois, that have invested more funds in parks, rather than to California.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Parks and green spaces serve as important areas for social interaction in urban communities. Researchers in Chicago have shown that people who live in public housing developments that include green spaces tend to build stronger social relationships with neighbors than people surrounded primarily by concrete. Neighbors visit their local parks and recreational facilities to attend social activities such as sporting competitions, music performances, and art classes. Residents in greener neighborhoods reported that they felt safer, and were more likely to participate in neighborhood activities. In these ways residents have a chance to connect with new people as well as old friends.

Recreational facilities and structured athletic activities within parks provide young people with opportunities for social networking with peers, and for establishing positive relationships with adult mentors. These opportunities give young people important social skills, and make them less vulnerable to undesirable influences. The cost of supporting city parks and recreational centers is minimal when compared to the potential long-term cost of incarceration.

¹³ "The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space", Trust for Public Land, 2006, page 26.

¹⁴ San Francisco Partnership for Parks (1998). "Golden Gate Park, the DeYoung Museum, and the California Academy of Sciences: Some Facts and Conclusions" p.17

¹⁵ Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy: Alcatraz. Website: www.parksconservancy.org/visit/alcatraz/tours.asp

Community gardens foster positive social benefits for neighbors. A 2003 study of community gardens in St. Louis found that neighborhoods with community gardens had a more stable population.¹⁶ While the city of St. Louis lost thirteen percent of its residents between 1990 and 2000, the neighborhoods with community gardens lost just six percent. Advocates for community gardens nationwide report that these spaces reduce crime, encourage neighbors to become responsible custodians, and foster interaction between people from diverse backgrounds.

Finally, access to safe, clean, and green public spaces can keep San Francisco a healthy and vibrant city, by helping retain families and the middle class. A series of articles in the SF Chronicle cite open space and safe streets as key incentives to keep families in San Francisco. This need is further established when the article investigates best practices in other cities and concludes that “the success of any city in keeping these families will depend on how well it keeps its end of the bargain in providing vibrant, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods and good, green open spaces”¹⁷

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

A 1996 study by the National Center for Disease Control revealed what park advocates had known all along: people who have access to parks exercise more. The study found that the percentage of people who exercised at least three days a week increased by more than 25% after a new exercise space was created, or if access to those spaces was enhanced.¹⁸ People who engage in regular exercise gain dramatic physical and emotional benefits. Exercise has been shown to reduce the risk of diabetes and heart disease by encouraging weight loss, improving respiration and circulation, and lowering blood pressure. Investing in parks is an excellent preventive medicine when compared to long-term health care costs for inactive people.

Urban green spaces act as therapeutic oases to which people can escape to connect with nature. Spending time in parks makes people feel more relaxed, alert, and peaceful, less fearful and angry. Even an indirect connection to nature, such as the ability to look out a window at a green space, has been proven to have dramatic physical effects. A study at a Pennsylvania hospital reported that patients with views of trees from their hospital room needed fewer painkillers, and had shorter hospital stays than patients whose rooms faced a brick wall.¹⁹ A study in the Netherlands in 2001 found that people with access to green space reported feeling healthier, both physically and mentally. When access to any type of green space, such as a park, farm, or forest, was increased by only a small amount, health complaints were reduced significantly.²⁰

In the next section we will survey San Francisco’s neighborhoods to identify those most lacking in parks, open spaces, and popular recreational facilities. Our goal is to fill

¹⁶ Sherer, page 22

¹⁷ Holt, Tim. SF Chronicle. How San Francisco Can Keep Its Families From Moving Out, April 8, 2007. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/08/INGFJP4MEF1.DTL>

¹⁸ Sherer, page 14.

¹⁹ Sherer, page 14.

²⁰ Sherer, page 15.

these gaps in order to provide all of the economic, social and physical benefits for every City resident.

GAPS IN PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

A glance at a map of San Francisco shows some very large areas of parkland and open space--there are more than 5700 acres of open space owned by local, state, federal and private authorities within the city's boundaries²¹ (see *Map 1*). This translates into a ratio of 7.8 acres of open space per 1,000 residents – somewhat below the national standard of 10 acres per 1,000 inhabitants set by the National Recreation and Park Association.²² This is still an impressive figure in light of the fact that San Francisco's population density is second only to New York City among American cities.

However, the preponderance of our open space is located in the western half of the city. In addition to the Presidio, the combined land area of Lincoln Park, Ocean Beach, Golden Gate Park, Stern Grove, Fort Funston and Lake Merced is more than 2,100 acres, all west of Arguello Avenue. These spaces are vitally important to our city's environment, and to the residents who frequent these spaces. However, many people from the eastern half of San Francisco find it difficult to get to these parks, and many never do.

As we will illustrate in the following pages, there is an extreme inequality in the accessibility, type, and distribution of open spaces across the City. This is most apparent in the lower-income neighborhoods in the eastern sector. The Districts in the eastern part of San Francisco are the most lacking in open space, and they are also the neighborhoods that need these spaces most. The residents in these neighborhoods rely more on parks for recreation and open space, as they often do not have funds to join private clubs for exercise, or might not own a car to escape to natural areas outside of the city.

This is an unfortunate development pattern in San Francisco that is repeated across the country. The Trust for Public Land has found that poorer urban communities with large minority populations and large child populations often have fewer parks and inferior access to existing parks.²³ Often parks in lower-income neighborhoods have safety issues that discourage the community from visiting them. This lack of neighborhood parks can be linked with a lower rate of exercise, resulting in health problems such as obesity and asthma.

EASTERN SAN FRANCISCO (DISTRICTS 3, 6, 9, 10 AND 11)

The eastern side of the City, especially along the waterfront corridor from North Beach to the City border, was identified as the highest priority for new recreation and park improvements in the Recreation and Open Space Element of the General Plan

²¹ For a list of parks in each district, see Table 1.

²² See Table 2 for statistics on other cities.

²³ In its comparative analysis of park access, No Place to Play, TPL noted that in major cities, parks are least likely to be located in areas with high concentrations of young children. Los Angeles is a case in point.

approved in 1986.²⁴ At that time, much of the eastern shoreline, which did not traditionally have much parkland, was zoned for industry, with little area earmarked for residential or commercial uses. As these areas are now being redeveloped for residential purposes, creating adequate parkland and public open space is essential.

Eastern San Francisco enjoys several large ‘breathing room’ open spaces²⁵, including McLaren Park and Glen Canyon Park. There are approximately 980 acres of green space in the eastern waterfront corridor of San Francisco, as compared to nearly 4800 acres in the western corridor (*see Map 1*). While McLaren Park and Bayview Hill ostensibly serve as neighborhood parks for residents of the Eastern Neighborhoods, many people find access to these parks difficult. In addition, because these parks are not well served by public transportation and are surrounded by relatively low-density neighborhoods, many of the parks in this side of the City do not develop a critical mass of park users necessary to keep them vibrant and safe public gathering spaces. In fact, many residents avoid these local parks because they perceive them as dangerous places.

Districts 3 and 6 are the only Districts in San Francisco with no large ‘breathing room’ spaces within their borders. Just a little more than half an acre of public open space was added to District 3 (Financial District, Chinatown, North Beach neighborhoods) through the Open Space Fund from 1976 until 2002, with another 1.7 acres provided in 2002 when Ferry Park was transferred to the Recreation and Park Department from the Department of Public Works (*see Map 5*). The waterfront area of District 3 has benefited from private park development, such as the 1.77-acre Levi Strauss Plaza and 1.66-acre Sidney Walton Park. However, in using either a *per capita* or usable space analysis, District 3 is still in great need for more parks, and holds the title of District most deficient of open space in San Francisco.

South of Market/Tenderloin (District #6) is a runner up for open space shortage, although more than five acres of open space have been added in this District through the Open Space Fund, and an additional 48 acres of parkland is newly installed or planned as part of the Redevelopment Agency’s Mission Bay project. These additions will bring the total open space in District 6 to approximately 100 acres. Despite these additions, a glance at the open space map for the District (*see Map 8*) shows that there are no green spaces in many neighborhoods, and only the recently developed Kid Power Park serves the north Mission, an area where many families with children reside.

²⁴ See Map 9 of San Francisco General Plan, Recreation and Open Space Element (ROSE). ROSE states that “priority should be given to areas with the highest needs and the greatest deficiencies in parks and recreation facilities, and programs. These are generally the more densely populated, older areas of the City where low-income, minority populations are concentrated, where there are larger numbers of children and elderly people, and where people have less mobility and financial resources to seek recreation outside of their neighborhood. (ROSE, Section I.3.46) To view the plan, visit http://www.sfgov.org/site/planning_index.asp?id=24887

²⁵ “Breathing room” open space is defined by the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department as all dedicated open spaces (parks, greenspaces, trails, and boulevards,) regardless of use, topography or access restrictions, but not including tidelands and shorelands. Breathing room open space is not necessarily developed, accessible or usable for active or passive recreational activities.

Most City residents are unaware that Treasure Island is a portion of District 6. Residents there are in dire need of new facilities and improved parks. A promising Master Plan for Treasure Island has been developed, featuring more than 300 acres of open space, over 50% of the entire island. Included are a “Great Park” with an environmental education center, neighborhood parks and playgrounds, playing fields, an organic farm, and a marina. Six thousand residential units, in low and mid-rise buildings, will be clustered around these neighborhood parks. This is good news; yet it behooves all of us to ensure that this plan protects the natural resources found on Yerba Buena, and provides for the needs of neighborhoods of the future.

District #9, consisting of the Mission District and Bernal Heights, has relatively good coverage in its *midsection*, but *very poor coverage in the northern and southern sections* (see Map 11). The District has three large facilities and open spaces, St Mary’s Recreation Center, Bernal Hill, and Holly Park, but almost all of the remaining spaces are less than 1/2 acre, and many are less than 1/4 acre. A recent addition, Parque Niños Unidos, is just over 1/2 an acre. This park resulted from a 10-year community-led effort to create a park in the poorly served northern section of the Mission.

District #10 (*Map 12*), including Bayview, Hunters Point and Potrero Hill, has the largest population of children in the city, yet the area is lacking adequate green spaces and playgrounds to serve its residents (*see Map 14*). This is true despite the fact that District #10 added the largest amount of open space (50.84 acres) of all the Districts through the Open Space Fund, and more park development is planned for the near future at Hunters Point. However, the largest addition to the District’s open space, Bayview Hill (36.25 acres), qualifies largely as ‘breathing room’ space due to lack of accessibility. The City should provide improved access to environmentally rich Bayview Hill, along with education programs for school groups.

District #11, including the Excelsior, Ingleside and Outer Mission neighborhoods, lacks open space in many neighborhoods (*see Map 13*). Despite the fact that it houses the second-highest density of children in the city, the Open Space Fund has provided only 3.89 acres of open space in this District since 1975. Numerous areas of the District need playgrounds. This District will receive a much-needed community center when the Geneva Car Barn renovation is complete. Yet green spaces for picnics and the healthy enjoyment of nature, for many neighborhoods, will still be lacking.

The City’s second largest park, McLaren Park (312.54 acres), is just over the eastern border in District #10, providing substantial ‘breathing room’ space. Unfortunately, this park has been underutilized due to perceived problems with safety as well as accessibility (many sections are very steep). Yet it contains an amphitheater, tennis and basketball courts, two lakes and a playground, and could provide much more usable open space if its Master Plan were implemented. The park should be developed with more recreational facilities and features desired by both the neighborhood and citywide

residents.

The southeastern corridor is a part of San Francisco that has large tracts owned by various public agencies. This ownership represents a tremendous opportunity. San Francisco has in the past benefited from the exchange of public land between agencies to create new parks in our City. The need for open space along the southeastern corridor is so great that we should concentrate on these partnerships, and on specific assignment of sites in future bond or levies, to ensure that we meet explicit needs in a cost-effective manner.

CENTRAL SAN FRANCISCO (DISTRICTS 2, 5, AND 8)

The Districts in central San Francisco are generally well served by parks, at least in terms of open space. The southern part of District 8 has been a real winner in Open Space Fund allocations, with more than 17.5 acres of parkland added, resulting from 11 transactions – the largest number of projects in any District. Yet the Castro/Noe Valley neighborhoods still have gaps in playgrounds and usable open space (see *Map 10 and Map 14*).

District 2 (Russian Hill/Pacific Heights/Marina/Presidio Heights/Seacliff) is one of two Districts in the City (the other being District 4, the Sunset) that has received no additional acreage from the Open Space Fund, probably due to the fact that nearly 90 percent of the area is already served by green space (see *Map 4*). However, playgrounds are still lacking in the northern and eastern sections of this District (see *Map 14*).

Residents of the Haight (District #5) are fortunate to have easy access to large park spaces including the Panhandle and Golden Gate Park, historic Alamo Square Park, and Buena Vista Park. Thanks to the smaller parks in the neighborhoods (e.g. Rose Page Mini Park), more than 88% of the District's adult population is served by green space.

On the eastern border of District #5, the landscaping of Octavia Boulevard and the lovely new park, Patricia's Green, add green relief in Hayes Valley. Yet the future is troubling. The Market-and-Octavia Plan proposes to eliminate housing density limits in the area, and if this is passed, the existing green space will not adequately serve the expected influx of new residents. However, the neighborhood has many parcels of public land that should be converted to public parks to serve future residents.

WESTERN SAN FRANCISCO (DISTRICTS 1, 4, AND 7)

The problem with calculating open space on a *per capita* basis is that an inequitable distribution of usable open space may not be apparent. Many sections of our City, even in the seemingly park-rich western half, provide no neighborhood parks — usable green space with trees and landscaped areas and both active and passive recreation areas within a 10-minute walk from one's residence. Some neighborhoods lack even

playgrounds for children. The Open Space Gap Map (*Map 2*) and the Playground Gap Map (*Map 14*) illustrate the areas where the City needs to increase the amount of usable open space in order to provide an equitable distribution of parks and playgrounds.

The Sunset (District #4—see *Map 6*) and the Richmond neighborhoods (District #1—see *Map 3*) provide an illustration of the effect of using two different lenses to examine open space availability. These Districts are both bordered by large parks, but with few smaller parks within their borders. Planners in the 1920s and '30s assumed that these large parks, and the backyards of District residents, provided sufficient area to meet open space needs. Residents who lived in the center of these Districts were expected to walk the mile and a half to the nearest regional facility.

Many San Franciscans still believe that Districts #1 and #4 are adequately served by parks. However, few parents or residents living in the middle of these Districts, who might try to find a playground, an area to throw a Frisbee, or a place to read a book quietly on a bench, can find such a spot within a 10 minute walk. More than 54 percent of District #4 residents cannot walk to a neighborhood park within 1/4 mile (see *Map 20*). District #1 residents also have poor access to neighborhood parks — more than 33 percent of residents have to walk more than 1/4 mile to enjoy their “local” park (see *Map 17*). Unserved population of these Districts are shown as gradations of brown on the neighborhood park gap-maps.

Despite these shortages, no acreage was added to the Sunset District through the Open Space Fund in thirty years, and less than 1 acre of open space (Great Highway/Balboa Natural Area) has been added in the Richmond District. The Richmond District did, however, get a brand new recreation center that occupies land leased from the San Francisco School District (see *Table 3*.)

District 7, in the southwestern part of the City, has large breathing room spaces, with Lake Merced at its southern border and Golden Gate Park close to its northern border. However, there are major gaps in neighborhood green spaces to the east of 19th Ave, and significant shortages in playgrounds throughout the District (see *Map 23 and Map 14*). While 12.51 acres of parkland has been added to the District in the past thirty years using Open Space funds, nearly all of these projects have provided natural, but not necessarily accessible, open spaces. These properties meet breathing room standards, but there is still a major need in the District for recreation facilities and usable neighborhood parks.

NEED FOR PLAYGROUNDS

While we do not have the funding to complete an equity evaluation of all RPD facilities at this time, NPC has plotted the distribution of most playgrounds around the City (*Map 14*.) We selected this category of recreation facility for initial analysis both as a result of our awareness of playground needs through our Playground Campaign, and because of the critical importance of these facilities to the quality of family life.

San Francisco has the smallest population of children of any major U.S. city.²⁶ So why is NPC concerned with the number of playgrounds we have? Children playing in parks are an obvious hallmark of a flourishing urban environment. According to Gordon Price, former City Councilor for the City of Vancouver, their planning department views children as the ‘indicator species’ for successful planning projects. If the projects are well done, with plenty of usable green space, families with children will move in. Vancouver has results to prove it. How can San Francisco expect to retain and attract working families if parents are unable to take their children to a nearby playground?

To find the areas of the City where children’s play areas are lacking, NPC plotted existing City playgrounds and included demographic data from the 2000 census in order to see how well these facilities serve the City’s neighborhoods with the highest population of children. District 10 has the highest population of children in the city (18,803), but RPD playgrounds in this District do not currently serve 24% of the children. District 4, despite a smaller population of children (11,615), has the highest percentage (64.72%) of children not served by playgrounds. However, this statistic would decrease to approximately 40% if existing school playgrounds were made accessible outside of school hours.

It is apparent that many San Francisco neighborhoods are lacking playgrounds even when all agency sites are open and available. Compare the statistics in the following two tables to see how the playground gaps in some neighborhoods (*Table A*) would be significantly reduced if the School District’s playgrounds were made available for public use after school hours (*Table B*). The RPD & School District Playground Gap Map (*Map 15*) also shows the increased number of children that would be served if school district playgrounds were more accessible to neighborhood children outside of school hours.

District	District Children’s Population	Number of Children served by RPD playgrounds	% of Children served by RPD playgrounds	Number of Children NOT served by RPD playgrounds	% of Children NOT served by RPD playgrounds
1	9,477	5,035	53.13	4,442	46.87
2	5,954	4,227	70.99	1,727	29.01
3	6,171	5,755	93.26	416	6.74
4	11,615	4,098	35.28	7,517	64.72
5	7,041	5,908	83.91	1,133	16.09
6	7,003	4,544	64.89	2,459	35.11
7	11,100	5,872	52.90	5,228	47.10
8	6,080	4,517	74.29	1,563	25.71

²⁶ 14.5 percent of the City population is under the age of 18, according to a May 24, 2005 article in the San Francisco Chronicle: “Child Population Dwindles in San Francisco”, by Lisa Leff.

9	13,898	12,392	89.16	1,506	10.84
10	18,803	14,275	75.92	4,528	24.08
11	15,521	9,049	58.30	6,472	41.70
City	112,663	75,672	67.17	36,991	32.83

District	District Children's Population	Number of Children served by RPD & Elementary Schools playgrounds	% of Children served by RPD & Elementary Schools playgrounds	Number of Children NOT served by RPD & Elementary Schools playgrounds	% of Children NOT served by RPD & Elementary Schools playgrounds
1	9,477	6,017	63.49	3,460	36.51
2	5,954	4,957	83.25	997	16.75
3	6,171	6,140	99.50	31	0.50
4	11,615	6,983	60.12	4,632	39.88
5	7,041	5,809	82.50	1,232	17.50
6	7,003	5,899	84.24	1,104	15.76
7	11,100	5,871	52.89	5,229	47.11
8	6,080	4,542	74.70	1,538	25.30
9	13,898	12,514	90.04	1,384	9.96
10	18,803	16,478	87.63	2,325	12.37
11	15,521	11,632	74.94	3,889	25.06
City	112,663	86,842	77.08	25,821	22.92

Clearly, a joint use agreement with the School District that combines resources is essential. This cooperative agreement and shared use of facilities was recommended in the 1986 Recreation and Open Space Element of the General Plan, Policy 4.2. Such agreements are standard practice in cities such as Chicago that have made huge strides converting concrete schoolyards into neighborhood parks and playgrounds.²⁷ San Francisco would do well to develop such a plan to fill in the gaps in playgrounds, especially in children-dense neighborhoods.

In September 2006, a preliminary meeting on this subject was called, with interested parties from the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and their Families (SF-DCYF), RPD, San Francisco Unified School District (SF-USD) and NPC in attendance. The discussion focused on the possibility of opening school playgrounds to the public school after school hours, as well as other school district recreational facilities such as playing fields, running tracks, and basketball courts. All parties agreed that this was an attainable goal for the near future, but that the San Francisco Unified School District and the City would first have to resolve issues of liability and cooperation. Follow up discussions have not yet taken place – a sign of needed

²⁷ To read more about Chicago's Campus Park Program, visit http://egov.cityofchicago.org/city/webportal/portalContentItemAction.do?BV_SessionID=@@@@0973874689.1194822039@@@@&BV_EngineID=ccccaddmhjfhmmfcefecelldffhdfgk.0&contentOID=536896586&contentTypeName=COC_EDITORIAL&topChannelName=HomePage Accessed November 11, 2007.

leadership from the Mayor. NPC recommends that the Mayor's Office pay particular attention to getting these discussions going in his second term of office.

A 2004 survey of the RPD's recreational facilities and services, conducted by parks consultant Leon Younger, reinforces our findings that the number of existing playgrounds is insufficient to meet the current need. When asked to choose from a list of nineteen types of recreational facilities (multiple choices were permitted), thirty-two percent of survey respondents reported a need for children's playgrounds. Of that group, thirty-eight percent replied that "zero percent" of their needs were presently being met, the lowest percentage of the entire list.²⁸

NEED FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

After the first edition Green Envy report was completed, NPC undertook a more detailed analysis of the waterfront Districts (6, 9, 10 and 11) for the Mayor's Office of Community Development. The goal of this follow-up report, entitled *Green Envy Revisited (2006)*, was to more deeply analyze the availability of neighborhood parks in each district as opposed to the city's assumption that all facilities served a set geographical area based on their size. The report also investigated whether initial findings about open space inequities in these Districts were even more extreme than previously thought.

In *Green Envy Revisited*, NPC discarded the standard service-area analysis traditionally used by the City Planning Department which assigns only spatial service areas of either 1/8, 1/4 or 1/2-mile radius, based on a park's acreage. We revised the formula for park service areas because we realized that this type of analysis is insufficient when one considers the varied topography in San Francisco, as well as the relationship between park features and public usage. For example, playfields do not draw the same users as a park with picnic grounds and trails. That is, the availability of certain amenities, or lack thereof, in a park has a great effect on how people use that park. For example, an isolated and undeveloped natural area located on top of a hill will be used differently than a level green space which features both active and passive features such as a playground, pleasant landscaping, and picnic tables. *Green Envy Revisited* considered data about park location and accessibility, elements such as available playgrounds and landscaping, and then reviewed these features in relation to demographic data from the 2000 census in order to determine whether the existing parks were adequately meeting the needs of neighborhood residents. NPC conducted surveys of park users to determine public opinion about the essential features of a neighborhood park. In addition, we also reviewed definitions of

²⁸ Recreation Assessment Report, Summary Report, Leon Younger & PROS, August 2004, page 61.

neighborhood parks from park departments across the country, and developed a new definition to discuss with relevant city agencies. Our findings are reported here:

NPC and RPD jointly agreed to a list of five key elements that define a neighborhood park in San Francisco:

1. Serves as a social and recreational focal point for the neighborhood and is the basic unit of the San Francisco park system.
2. Provides green space where residents can go to escape the urban environment.
3. Offers both passive and active (programmed and unprogrammed) recreation in response to demographic and cultural characteristics of surrounding neighborhoods, with opportunities for interaction with nature.
4. Is a destination largely accessible by foot, bicycle, or public transit within at least a quarter-mile radius from neighborhood residences.
5. Provides ease of access for young and senior users, while serving users of all ages.²⁹

Using the methodology devised for *Green Envy Revisited*, we have updated our original neighborhood park statistics and maps for this 2007 edition of *Green Envy*.³⁰ We have found that District 3 (Financial District, North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and Chinatown neighborhoods—see *Map 19*) has the least amount of total park acreage of any District (50.16 acres), as well as the highest population density in the city. In addition, there are only 15.22 acres of neighborhood parkland within its boundaries. Nearly 38 percent of the adult population in District 3 is not served by a park within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of their home. Additionally, nearly thirty five percent of the District's resident children are not served by a park within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile.

District 10, the City's largest District, also has the largest population of children. This area is anticipating the redevelopment of the Hunter's Point Shipyard and population changes spurred by the completion of the 3rd Street Light Rail. It contains three large parks (Bayview Hill, McLaren Park, and Heron's Head Park) though none are considered easily accessible by many residents. This District is well served by sheer acreage of parkland, mostly because the City has made a concerted effort to rectify past inequities. There are 142.65 acres of neighborhood parkland in the District (see *Map 26*). However, a neighborhood park does still not serve 28.35 percent of the District area.³¹ Access to existing parks is considered problematic in the District due to perceived or actual conditions of these spaces (safety issues, etc.) NPC recommends efforts to increase the reach of existing parks through neighborhood greening initiatives.

²⁹ See page 50-51 for complete definition of a neighborhood park.

³⁰ See Table 4 for names and acreage of neighborhood parks. Neighborhood Park gap maps for all Districts can also be viewed in the appendix.

³¹ This statistic is not as alarming when you consider that most of the District's land is zoned industrial and maritime industrial, and that the current residential population is not large.

District 11 has the largest adult population of any District in the City, and also has the second highest population of children (second only to District 10.) Yet the existing acreage of parks and number of recreational facilities is extremely deficient. There are just 44.47 acres of neighborhood parkland, and more than 53 percent of the District's adult population is not served by a neighborhood park within ¼ mile of their homes (*see Map 27*). NPC stresses that the City should focus on District 11 when considering target areas for new parkland, including school grounds. Meanwhile, as recommended for District 10, the City should undertake greening measures in this area immediately.

NPC recommends that the Open Space Task Force set acquisition goals to assure that all of our City's residents have equal access to the numerous benefits of neighborhood parks within 10 minutes of their homes, regardless of their income level, racial or ethnic origin, age, or residential location.

Total Classified Park Acres by Type					
District	Mini Parks	Neighborhood Parks	Other Parks	Regional Parks	Remaining open spaces (reservoirs, etc.)
1	1.34	46.25	5.83	1330.79	1.84
2	1.27	84.90	4.07	1608.83	2.83
3	3.60	15.22	28.35	2.98	0.00
4	0.00	35.36	33.63	169.08	44.79
5	1.54	51.17	3.67	10.49	2.87
6	5.44	34.12	11.19	0.00	0.00
7	3.69	26.86	14.09	1035.33	73.50
8	2.64	58.05	6.98	126.66	11.45
9	2.11	56.01	5.09	0.00	0.00
10	3.67	142.65	8.79	489.21	55.81
11	1.36	44.47	6.29	56.46	6.29
City	26.66	595.07	127.97	4829.83	199.38

Area (in Acres) Served by Parks with Green Space*					
*Neighborhood and Regional parks within 1/4 mile service area					
District	District Area (Acres)	District Area served by green space	% of District Area served by green space	District Area NOT served by green space	% of District Area NOT served by green space
1	3041.21	2607.87	85.75	433.34	14.25
2	3355.67	2999.35	89.38	356.31	10.62
3	1194.45	859.37	71.95	335.08	28.05
4	2490.61	1286.74	51.66	1203.87	48.34
5	1339.30	1284.47	95.91	54.83	4.09
6	2251.50	1522.76	67.63	728.74	32.37
7	4948.83	3780.37	76.39	1168.46	23.61
8	2145.28	1522.99	70.99	622.29	29.01
9	1479.75	1202.06	81.23	277.69	18.77
10	5384.15	3857.67	71.65	1526.48	28.35
11	1979.01	1197.59	60.51	781.42	39.49
City	29609.75	22121.24	74.71	7488.51	25.29

Area (in Square Miles) Served by Parks with Green Space*					
*Neighborhood and Regional parks within 1/4 mile service area					
District	District Area (Square Miles)	District Area served by green space	% of District Area served by green space	District Area NOT served by green space	% of District Area NOT served by green space
1	4.75	4.07	85.75	0.68	14.25
2	5.24	4.69	89.38	0.56	10.62
3	1.87	1.34	71.95	0.52	28.05
4	3.89	2.01	51.66	1.88	48.34
5	2.09	2.01	95.91	0.09	4.09
6	3.52	2.38	67.63	1.14	32.37
7	7.73	5.91	76.39	1.83	23.61
8	3.35	2.38	70.99	0.97	29.01
9	2.31	1.88	81.23	0.43	18.77
10	8.41	6.03	71.65	2.39	28.35
11	3.09	1.87	60.51	1.22	39.49
City	46.27	34.56	74.71	11.70	25.29

Adult Population Served by Parks with Green Space*					
*Neighborhood and Regional parks within 1/4 mile service area					
District	District Adult Population	# of Adults served by green space	% of Adults served by green space	# of Adults NOT served by green space	% of Adults NOT served by green space
1	69,978	46,344	66.23	23,634	33.77
2	67,065	46,326	69.08	20,739	30.92
3	70,150	43,636	62.20	26,514	37.80
4	70,672	32,250	45.63	38,422	54.37
5	71,217	63,025	88.50	8,192	11.50
6	68,901	38,634	56.07	30,267	43.93
7	68,877	38,945	56.54	29,932	43.46
8	70,079	36,669	52.33	33,410	47.67
9	71,049	51,662	72.71	19,387	27.29
10	73,209	61,680	84.25	11,529	15.75
11	74,083	34,406	46.44	39,677	53.56
City	775,280	493,577	63.66	281,703	36.34

Children Served by Parks with Green Space*					
*Neighborhood and Regional parks within 1/4 mile service area					
District	District Children's Population	Number of Children served by green space	% of Children served by green space	Number of Children NOT served by green space	% of Children NOT served by green space
1	9,477	6,450	68.06	3,027	31.94
2	5,954	4,385	73.65	1,569	26.35
3	6,171	4,022	65.18	2,149	34.82
4	11,615	5,331	45.90	6,284	54.10
5	7,041	6,360	90.33	681	9.67
6	7,003	3,137	44.80	3,866	55.20
7	11,100	5,958	53.68	5,142	46.32
8	6,080	2,552	41.97	3,528	58.03
9	13,898	10,286	74.01	3,612	25.99
10	18,803	16,304	86.71	2,499	13.29
11	15,521	7,284	46.93	8,237	53.07
City	112,663	72,069	63.97	40,594	36.03

RECREATIONAL FACILITY NEEDS

As suggested earlier, it would be highly valuable to map recreational facility gaps in San Francisco to see if all communities and neighborhoods have equal access to sports fields, recreational centers, hiking trails, and other desirable facilities.³² For the past few years, NPC has been leading the fight against proposals to privatize public golf courses in the city, citing excess acreage devoted to this sport, and also the demonstrated need for other types of recreation. We are happy to report that the efforts of our coalition to promote of the equitable use of open space in our city have

³² For statistics on recreation facilities in San Francisco and other cities, see Table 5.

finally paid off: in July 2007, the Board of Supervisors agreed to fund a study of alternative recreation use of golf course land to see if the conversation is feasible.

Meanwhile, until this study is complete, subjective and objective survey data regarding recreational needs presented in the 2004 Recreation Assessment Report are useful to consider. Produced by Leon Younger and Pros Consulting³³, the report's aim was to assess the recreational needs of San Francisco residents and to analyze RPD's efforts in the areas of programming, marketing, partnership, recreational facility management, as well as equity in access and distribution. The report presents a number of expert and public opinions that strongly support the efforts of open space advocates to acquire more open space. Below we have compiled the relevant opinions and statistics from the report that relate to parks and also to recreational activities that are conducted outdoors in parks and open spaces.

PARKS ARE THE MOST POPULAR RPD FACILITIES

The three RPD facilities visited most often in the previous year by people surveyed were all parks or open space areas. The RPD facility that was most often visited in the year before the study was Golden Gate Park, followed by Dolores Park, and Crissy Field (though Crissy Field is a GGNRA facility.)

RUNNING / WALKING / BIKING TRAILS ARE AMONG MOST IMPORTANT RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Seventy-six percent of households surveyed reported a need for more walking/biking trails. Fifty-five percent of all households surveyed selected walking/biking trails as one of the four most important recreational facilities for themselves and their household.

MOST POPULAR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY IS RUNNING / WALKING

Sixty seven percent of respondents said that at least one person in their household currently runs or walks for exercise. Of this group, ninety-three percent run/walk for exercise at least once a month, and fifty-six percent run/walk several times a week. The greatest percentage of respondents (28 percent) chose running/walking as one as one of four types of recreational activities that they would participate in more often if programming were increased.

MORE NATURE AREAS ARE NEEDED

Sixty-one percent of households surveyed reported that at least one person in their household currently visits nature areas, of which sixty-seven percent of those surveyed reported visiting a nature area at least once a month. Twenty-four percent of respondents selected nature areas as one of four types of recreational facilities that they would visit more often if programming were increased, second only to running/walking for exercise.

NOT ENOUGH COMMUNITY GARDENS

When asked to choose their facility needs from a list of 19 types of recreational facilities (multiple choices were permitted), forty-seven percent of households reported a need for

³³ As a result of RPD's 2002 Strategic Plan, Leon Younger & Pros Consulting was hired in 2004 to produce a Recreation Assessment Report for RPD. This was the first such report produced in the department's 100-year history. The researchers surveyed the public via 19 focus groups, a community planning workshop, and 1,000 mail and phone surveys. Leon Younger & PROS is an internationally recognized park and recreation consulting firm, specializing in the development of strategic plans, master plans, business and marketing plans, feasibility studies and organizational efficiency management tools.

community gardens. But only 11 percent said they were getting 100 percent of this need met through existing garden facilities (thirty percent reported they got zero percent of their needs met.) Twenty-one percent of all households selected community gardens as one of the four most important types of recreational facilities for themselves and their household.

NUMBER OF RECREATION FIELDS IN THE CITY BELOW NATIONAL STANDARD

The study found that the ratio for the current inventory of ball fields is 1 field/11,640 people. RPD would have to add 30 more ball fields (through new acquisition or redevelopment) to reach the consultant's recommended standard. The study also found the current number of soccer fields to be below standard. The current ratio is 1 multi-use/soccer field per 18,735 people. RPD would have to add 35 multiuse/soccer fields (through new acquisition or redevelopment) to reach the consultant's recommended standard.

The study also found that sports field locations are not equally distributed throughout the City's neighborhoods and that the current inventory of fields are not well maintained. Forty-six percent of respondents reported they were unhappy that dog owners are using sport fields as dog-walking areas, sullyng the fields for athletes. There is obviously a need to create separate facilities for each of these groups.

DOG WALKING

Twenty-six percent of respondent households expressed the need for dog play areas. Of this percentage, eighty-seven percent affirmed that they or someone in their household currently walk a dog at least several times per week. Yet twenty three percent of these respondents reported that current dog play areas meet zero percent of their needs. Fourteen percent of all respondents reported that dog walking was one of the four most important recreational activities for the people in their household.

The open space gap maps presented in this chapter reinforce the long-known fact that the eastern neighborhoods in San Francisco are the least well served by parks and open spaces. Yet by presenting a new definition of a "neighborhood park," and by mapping service areas for them, NPC has shown more specifically the gaps across the city where residents cannot access any usable green space within a short walk from their homes. In addition, our RPD playground gap maps with child population underlays show the neighborhoods where children are not currently being served by local playgrounds, while the maps showing RPD and school playgrounds suggest areas where more children could easily be served, simply by opening school playgrounds to the public, thereby avoiding the cost of building more playgrounds.

Our research aims to inform future acquisition efforts and to ensure that these efforts are targeted toward the areas with greatest population density and the largest open space and recreational facility gaps.

It is also important to note that there are several major redevelopment plans currently underway that will reshape many waterfront and former industrial areas in the eastern part of the city, including Bayview/Hunters Point, Mission Bay, Rincon Point/South Beach, and India Basin. The City should act immediately to acquire more open space to remedy the unequal distribution of parks across the city, and to plan for future population growth in these particular areas.

HISTORY OF OPEN SPACE LEGISLATION, FUNDING AND RESULTS IN SAN FRANCISCO

OPEN SPACE FUND

San Francisco's efforts to save existing open space and create new parks in those neighborhoods without them goes back 30 years with the establishment of the Open Space Fund. While other opportunities have produced parks through the development process (e.g. Redevelopment Agency), through one-time circumstances (e.g. decommissioning of military bases), or through private development (e.g. Levi Plaza), the official city mechanism to actively acquire public open space for parks and recreation facilities has been through the Open Space Fund.

This fund provides an annual set-aside of property taxes of 2.5 cents of every \$100 of assessed value. The Fund has earned \$334 million³⁴ since it was established. Its original disposition required that 40 percent be spent on open space acquisition and development. Yet by 2000, only an average of \$400,000 annually³⁵ was actually being spent on acquisitions and development (and excluding the 60 percent required for maintenance). Proposition C, approved by the voters in 2000, raised the acquisition bar to 5 percent of the total fund, or about \$1 million per annum (property taxes vary from year to year), but the remainder is now almost all used for operation.

Since the Open Space Fund was established, numerous budget crises have forced more and more operating costs into the Fund to the point that more than 3/4 of it is now used for regular maintenance of parks and operation of various programs. After three decades, the total spent for acquisition amounts to only a little more than \$25 million, less than 10 percent of the total funds generated. This limited funding enabled the City to purchase just over 100 acres of land. For a list of properties acquired through the Open Space Fund, sorted by Supervisor District and including cost and type of property acquired or developed, see *Table 3*.

The Open Space Fund was renewed by the voters in 2000 for another 30 years, but at the same time was renamed the "Park, Recreation and Open Space Fund" to convey the broader purposes of these ear-marked tax dollars. The result is that the emphasis now is even less on open space acquisition and property development than at any time in the last 30 years—even though the fund has more earmarked dollars for acquisition than ever before. **Clearly the time is past due to consider how to revamp the fund to meet the huge acquisition and capital improvement needs of the Recreation and Park system.**

³⁴ Subject to verification by the Recreation and Parks Department

³⁵ Subject to verification by the Recreation and Parks Department

DOWNTOWN PARK FUND

The City also established a Downtown Park Fund in 1986 that charges fees to commercial developers in order to secure parks in the dense downtown districts at no cost to the taxpayers. A list of construction projects that have paid into the Downtown Park Fund are found in *Table 6*.

Disappointingly, to date, this fund which has collected approximately \$9.4 million, has purchased *no* property for new green spaces in the downtown area (see list of spaces created below); funds have instead been used to renovate existing parks such as Union Square and Ferry Park, or to build concrete plazas or indoor lobby spaces. The Fund was also used recently to renovate a park outside of the downtown district borders, with the approval of the Recreation and Park Commission.³⁶ \$2.8 million³⁷ is now available and unused in this fund. On a more positive note: managers of this fund did oversee the transfer of 3.3 acre Rincon Park from the Redevelopment Agency to the Recreation and Park Department.³⁸ The Recreation and Parks Department are also looking into expanding the borders where funds may be applied.

Since 1985, when the *Downtown Plan* was enacted, 14 open spaces have been created or enhanced as part of the *Downtown Plan* requirements, at the following locations:

Before 1994:

- **505 Montgomery Street:** Pedestrian improvements to Commercial Street and creation of Grabhorn pocket park.
- **235 Pine Street:** Improvements to Commercial Street.
- **525 Market Street:** Improvements to plaza on Market Street
- **343 Sansome Street:** Creation of new roof garden.
- **100 First Street:** Creation of second-level view terrace, accessible from the street.
- **600 California Street:** Contributed money to develop a park in Chinatown.

Since 1994:

- **101 Second Street:** Creation of indoor garden in lobby with rotating public art exhibits.
- **150 California Street:** Creation of 6th floor terrace garden with sculpture "Arbor Arch" built into plaza.
- **199 Fremont Street:** Creation of south-facing plaza and pedestrian walkway connecting Howard and Fremont Streets behind an existing building. Plaza has public art and poetry built into the design.
- **235 Second Street:** Creation of south-facing entry plaza with arcade, and indoor public seating area.

³⁶ Victoria Manalo Draves Park, formerly known as Bessie Carmichael Park or SOMA Park.

³⁷ Subject to verification by the Recreation and Park Department

³⁸ See Table 7 for details on the Downtown Park Fund as of November 30, 2006.

- **55 Second Street:** Creation of indoor galleria and greenhouse, and outdoor plaza on Jessie and Anthony Alleys.
- **560 Mission Street:** Creation of 14,000 square foot ground-level plaza with public art, and continuous pedestrian arcade around base of building.
- **200 California Street:** Improvements to sidewalk, by bulbing-out the sidewalk, and addition of a seating area and sculpture.
- **500 Howard Street:** Creation of two corner plazas on 1st and Howard Streets (the other two corners are planned for similar treatment); sidewalk extensions along Natoma and 1st Streets.³⁹

REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The majority of new parkland added in San Francisco in the last 30 years has been created as the result of private developments (see *Table 8*), rather than by city-funded purchasing of private property for parks. Mission Bay, a new mega-project of the Redevelopment Agency, will ultimately add approximately 48 acres of green space, which is about half the total parkland acquired over 30 years of effort purchasing bits and pieces of land with the Open Space Fund (see *Table 3*.) A large property in single ownership, such as Mission Bay (300+ acres), provides a unique opportunity for the city to require a developer to create open space. Yet the City could go even further to make the most of private development. For example, developers of smaller scale projects should also be required to provide open space, as these spaces are essential to creating livable neighborhoods in the eastern corridor and throughout the city.

PROPOSITION A

A third source of funding for open space acquisition in San Francisco was created in 2000 with the passage of Proposition A, a \$110 million general obligation bond dedicated for neighborhood parks. Bond funds can be used either for the purchase of property or development of new facilities. However, the bond measure ultimately earmarked for development of new parks, given the huge repairs costs for existing facilities (this cost is now estimated to be \$1.8 billion in 2007 following a professional estimate).

In summary, funds available for acquisition of open space in San Francisco have not been used as the voters originally intended nor did they provide the benefits that fee payers (in the downtown areas) had been promised. There is currently no strategy of targeted acquisitions intended to serve those neighborhoods without parks. There is no stated goal, or standard, for either 'breathing space' or 'usable' open space in San Francisco. And there is no comprehensive plan for open space acquisitions that coordinates the efforts of various parties developing parks under a broad vision of achieving equity in the distribution of open space in our city. The Recreation and Open Space Element of the General Plan is the appropriate planning vehicle to provide that broad vision, but it was last updated in the mid 1980's. Finally, there are

³⁹ Lawrence B. Badiner, Zoning Administrator, San Francisco Planning Department (01.09.2007)

no specific criteria established for acquisitions, including whether “high need” is defined as purely a demographic need by income and age group, or whether deficiencies in certain recreational facilities such as playgrounds might also qualify as high need. Clearly, a new round of planning is in order.

ACQUISITION METHODS: HOW DO WE CLOSE THE GAPS?

Given the tremendous benefits of parks, it would seem to make sense that cities would obtain as much open space as possible. The economics of urban land use and the required population density for optimum use of parks, however, make new park development more complex than it appears at first glance. Nineteenth century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, best known as the designer of Central Park, as well as his son, cautioned about acquiring too much open space as well as too little. Effective park development considers the right amount of space in the right place, configured for the right uses. This is why it is essential that open space standards consider open space size in relation to the surrounding population density (current or projected). For instance, McLaren Park is far too large for the surrounding density and Portsmouth Square (in Chinatown, a neighborhood with little open space) is way too small for the surrounding density.

Acreage alone, therefore, is not necessarily a good measure of success in appraising an open space system and it is certainly not the only standard needed. It is necessary to further analyze San Francisco's park system using a comprehensive framework in order to effectively meet both geographical gaps in parkland as well as category deficiencies (e.g. no playing field within two miles). A more comprehensive analysis would consider population density in specific neighborhoods in relation to acreage of new parks, and would also bear in mind the citywide needs for types of parkland and recreation facilities.

ACQUISITION METHODS USED IN SAN FRANCISCO

Given the high cost of urban land, it is useful to examine the effectiveness of the different types of open space acquisition methods (and results) used in San Francisco over the past three decades in order to develop a highly targeted approach to acquisition for the next century. San Francisco has used the following methods targeted to acquire open space and recreation facilities:

- **Enforcing zoning requirements** for residential (private open space) and commercial development (public access)
- **Transferring public land** from one agency (federal, state) to a locally-controlled agency (SF Recreation and Park Department)
- **Collecting fees** set in development negotiations
- **Creating parkland in land controlled by non-city agencies** (e.g. Redevelopment Agency, Port Authority, Housing Authority, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Hunter's Point and Candlestick Park)
- **Purchasing property** using Open Space Funds, bond funds, or state and federal funds

- **Using eminent domain** proceedings against a non-willing seller to acquire property with public funds
- **Negotiating large public park (at least 1/2 acre) development on private property with continued management by private business owners**

EFFECTIVE METHODS USED IN OTHER CITIES

In addition to the methods above, other cities have successfully utilized the following methods:

- **Converting tax delinquency foreclosures to land or property for open space** (Philadelphia)
- **Specifying “Open Space Zone” requirements** (Portland, OR and some CA and CO towns)
- **Purchasing land through local levy of special taxes** (Portland, OR, Chicago, IL, Seattle, WA)
- **Establishing park improvement districts** (New York City)
- **Establishing public benefit zoning districts** (5 in San Francisco, Boston)
- **Establishing landscape assessment districts** (Many CA and WA towns, including Oakland, CA)
- **Requiring developers to acquire, develop, and maintain public parks** (New York City)
- **Open Space Tax** (Boulder, Colorado)
- **Sales Taxes on Sporting Goods** (states of Texas and Florida)

East Coast cities often use tax delinquency foreclosure to acquire property for open space. This approach is facilitated by the large amount of abandoned property available in many inner cities on the east coast, but is less relevant in San Francisco.

West Coast cities tend to use inter-agency transfers of public land.⁴⁰ Another popular strategy is sharing use of property with other public agencies, such as a School District (e.g. Tule Elk Park in the Marina), along with the sale of bonds (Proposition A in 2000) and the levy of special taxes for specific time periods to acquire property as open space. Seattle and Portland, Oregon have been very effective at the ballot with the levy of special taxes for specific park acquisition programs (e.g. Seattle’s ProParks Levy 2000.) San Francisco’s Open Space Fund is a set-aside of homeowners’ property tax.

⁴⁰ DPW transferred Ferry Park to the Recreation and Park Department, and the San Francisco Unified School District traded land, allowing both Michelangelo Playground and Victoria Manalo Draves Park to be developed.

San Franciscans benefited greatly from the decommissioning of military bases in the 1970's and 1980's, adding both Fort Mason and the Presidio to our available inventory of parkland (Ocean Beach and Fort Funston were transferred to the GGNRA to reduce these maintenance burdens). These types of acquisitions obviously depend on luck rather than strategy. However, the city has also gained more than 200 acres of parkland from the targeted development of green space on federally controlled properties managed by the Redevelopment Agency. This has been a very cost-effective method to expand our park acreage (*see Table 8*).

OBSTACLES IN SAN FRANCISCO

In looking at mechanisms other than one-time transfer of military land, or the development and/or transfer of park land by other public agencies, RPD has added just over 100 acres to its open space inventory in 30 years through direct purchase of private property or the sale/transfer of public property to RPD's jurisdiction (*see Table 3*). This represents a mere three percent growth in City-managed parkland (as opposed to federal and state). In comparison, Portland, Oregon's parkland has grown 20 percent in this same period, and Seattle has achieved a 48 percent increase. Chicago, a high-density city like San Francisco with serious land constraints, has achieved a growth in parkland of 17 percent.⁴¹

Cost of land is certainly an important factor shaping the purchase of property for parks in any major metropolitan area. Recognizing that fact, San Franciscans approved a set-aside of property taxes in 1974 that has provided more than \$334 million to the Open Space Fund for property acquisition and development and care of *new* parks. The City also established a Downtown Park Fund in 1986 that taxed developers of new office buildings so that new parks in the dense downtown area could be provided at no cost to City residents as well as the office workers in the new buildings. To date, this Fund has collected more than \$9 million. In addition, voters approved the Neighborhood Park Bond in 2000 that could have contributed to open space acquisitions as well as development of new recreational facilities in neighborhoods that are lacking them. In theory, at least, San Francisco has had more resources than most cities with which to purchase open space and develop new facilities.

To understand how San Francisco has not been able to fill in the gaps in our park system with all these resources, we need to examine the actual practices guiding the acquisition of open space and the expenditure of funds raised for this purpose in San Francisco during the past three decades. The key to a good acquisition program is not just money, but strategy. Cities that have been effective in building their park system have followed several guidelines:

- **Don't pay if you don't have to; use public land where possible**
- **Use the cheapest method possible when you must pay**

⁴¹ All city data from Peter Harnik, *Inside City Parks*, Urban Land Institute, 2000

- **Pay for property with appropriate sources (i.e. use local tax dollars for properties that are not easily matched with state, federal or private source)**
- **Use public policy to conduct acquisitions that improve the equitable distribution of open space**

And most important,

- **Make acquisition a priority and develop a plan to meet objectives**

San Francisco has not done a good job of following these guidelines. In the last fifteen years, the City's acquisition efforts have been more reactive than proactive in filling the gaps of the open space system. The Open Space Committee, established in 1975, was initially responsive to the Recreation Open Space Element of the General Plan, adopted in 1974 and amended in 1986, which indicated specific sites for acquisition and mapped the high need areas ("high need" was defined by economic criteria only).

But the City has been miserly (allocating only \$24 million for acquisitions in over 30 years) in overall expenditures from the Open Space Fund and it lost track of high needs in many neighborhoods. Moreover, we have not always been frugal in individual transactions due to neighborhood pressure to acquire parcels at all costs. We have essentially squandered the Downtown Park Fund for unintended purposes and have not actually *purchased* any new parkland with this source. Finally, our public policy regarding open space is not comprehensive, lacks priorities, and does not include open space as a land use.

BEST PRACTICES: ACQUISITION, STEWARDSHIP AND FUNDING METHODS IN OTHER CITIES

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

(City size: 53,677 acres, City population: 573,911 people, 6,050 total acres of public parkland)

Seattle's open space acquisition program has two overall goals: green space preservation, and the development of neighborhood parks and open space. There are both 'ideal' standards and 'acceptable' standards for neighborhood parks and open space acquisitions. Furthermore, it is very clear that usable open space is the goal that counts in neighborhoods.

To meet acquisition standards in even the most densely populated neighborhoods, individual parcels must be at least 10,000 square feet, or approximately one-fourth of an acre. Smaller spaces are desirable, but they are not included in the Seattle standard for each neighborhood. Less accessible parcels are a part of the citywide total 'breathing room' open space, but are not counted for neighborhood-serving green space. Seattle has developed an "open space gap analysis" with maps to help guide their plan implementation.⁴²

It is informative to examine how Seattle raised and spent funds to implement its open space standards as rapid development forced the city to take action to save existing open spaces held privately. In 1989, Seattle helped to promote a large countywide bond, the King County Open Space and Trails Bond, which was approved by the voters. The Seattle portion of the bond was primarily aimed at preserving green space in the city. Seattle was able to leverage the \$35.2 million open space acquisition funding from the bond so that a total of about \$92 million was spent for acquisition. While recognizing that even the forested hillsides in Seattle are platted and zoned for urban development, Seattle was able to preserve approximately 600 acres in only eleven years, through property **acquisitions, transfers and donations**.

In 2000, Seattle again went to the voters, this time asking them to pass a \$198 million Pro Parks Levy⁴³ to be expended over an 8-year period within the city boundaries. This Levy provides both capital (for park acquisition and development) and operating funds (for enhanced maintenance, environmental stewardship and recreation programs). The Levy specifies three plans to secure open space:

The \$16 million Neighborhood Parks Acquisition category earmarks funds to acquire property for more than 18 new neighborhood parks;

⁴² See <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/publications/gapreport.htm>

⁴³ Bond: a certificate of ownership of a specified portion of a debt due to be paid by a government or corporation to an individual holder and usually bearing a fixed rate of interest. Levy: an imposing or collecting, as of a tax, by a government, authority or force.

The \$10 million Green Spaces category which funds property acquisition in designated green spaces to preserve habitat, forests and watersheds; The Levy's Opportunity Fund gave community members a chance to nominate park acquisition or development projects for funding, particularly in neighborhoods that are targeted to receive increased density. \$5.77 million was allocated for acquisition projects.

To date, the Levy has leveraged \$21 million in additional funding for acquisition. These leveraged funds include a significant grant from the Seattle Parks Foundation (the Foundation is also conducting a public process regarding a potential property donation to the City.) In combination with the \$31.7 million for acquisition in the Levy, the leveraged funding brings the amount currently available for acquisition to \$52.7 million. A major focus of the Pro Parks Levy is implementing citizen-developed neighborhood plans, and acquisition is primarily aimed at securing properties for new parks in under-served densely developed neighborhoods. Because property already zoned for intense development is quite expensive, the acreage acquired through the Levy will likely be only a fraction of that preserved through the 1989 bond, which focused on a broad swath of forested hillsides.

Together the voter-approved 1989 bond and 2000 Levy and the matching grants leveraged through these measures will permit Seattle to add nearly 700 acres of green space and parkland in dozens of neighborhoods throughout their city at an estimated cost of \$145 million.⁴⁴

PORTLAND, OREGON

(City size: 85,964 acres, City population: 533,427 people, 13,246 total acres of public parkland)

For the second time in a decade, Portland, Oregon metropolitan area voters approved a general obligation bond in November 2006 for acquiring natural areas (the first natural areas bond for \$135.6 million was approved in 1995). The \$227.4 million bond was sponsored by Metro (the elected regional planning and policy making agency which works to preserve the environmental quality of life); it aims specifically to increase and enhance water quality and natural areas on public lands. Portland's Forest Park⁴⁵, the nation's 3rd largest urban park, and the largest urban forest reserve in the country, is set to receive a 50-acre addition as a result of the bond.

Metro's protection and acquisition program for natural areas has relied upon a strict "willing seller" strategy, meaning that they do not utilize the power of eminent domain or land condemnation. However, Metro points out that most of the 261 properties that

⁴⁴ Seattle information provided by Catherine Anstett, Public Information Officer, Parks Department, City of Seattle

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Forest Park was created in 1948 as the result of 50 years of citizen advocacy for the City to buy tax-foreclosed properties. Source: Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_Park_\(Portland\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_Park_(Portland))

were purchased as of 2005 were not originally for sale. All land parcels were acquired through patience and face-to-face negotiations, by convincing land owners of the importance of conserving land in public ownership, and in one special case, by trading the purchase of a building for the right to build a public bike trail on a railroad owner's right-of-way. Metro's "willing seller" approach led them to purchase more land than planned in some target areas, and yet they fell short of their goals in other areas.⁴⁶

The Portland Park and Recreation Department (PP&R)'s acquisition program is presently funded primarily through the collection of residential Park System Development Charges (SDC), approved by the Portland City Council in 1998. New residential developers are required to pay a one-time fee (the SDC) of \$3,053 per single-family unit, which in turn generates about \$1.5 million annually for capital improvements in parks. The law requires that parkland acquisitions must be made only in neighborhoods facing new development and population growth. Outer East Portland, an area with a growing population, has benefited greatly from these fees, gaining several major acquisitions in recent years.

The Portland Parks and Recreation Department plans to use the System Development Charge revenues to acquire new parkland for neighborhood parks, community parks, and trails over a 20-year period. SDC funds are prioritized for land acquisition; however, they can also be used for development. In addition to the Park System Development Charges, PP&R also relies on acquisition funding from grants and one-time allocations from City Council. SDC funds are prioritized for acquisition rather than for development, as suitable parkland is growing scarce.

PP&R also relies upon nominations from the community to find out about potential parkland. The public can submit a Site Nomination Form to bring attention to a potential site. Staff adds the site to the overall acquisition inventory if it meets acquisition guidelines. As funds become available, properties are purchased, based on the city's acquisition priorities. PP&R, like Metro, also operates on a "willing seller" basis.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

(City size: 145,362 acres, City population: 2,842,518 people, Total acres of public parkland: 11,916)

Chicago's public parks are managed not by a city parks and recreation department, as is common across the country, but by the Chicago Park District (CPD) which is an agency, established by the state, that is independent from the City of Chicago and has its own taxing authority. The Mayor of Chicago appoints the General Superintendent of the Park District, but it has its own Board of Commissioners.

The Chicago Park District coordinates and cooperates very closely with the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development. The Department of Planning

⁴⁶ Open Space Program Review for Metro, by Talbot, Korvola & Warwick, LLP, March 2006, page 10.

and Development reports to the Mayor and the City Council, and is involved with funding, acquiring land, and planning for parks. The Chicago Park District is primarily responsible for the development, design, and maintenance of parks. Both the City of Chicago and the Chicago Park District have eminent domain authority and work with land conservancy trusts to acquire property.

Funding for park acquisition and development comes from Park District tax levies, state and federal grants, open space impact fees that the Department of Planning and Development collects for new residential developments, City tax exempt bonds, and tax increment financing.

The Park District and the Department of Planning and Development assess open space needs based on the 77 community areas within the city. The short-term goal of the CitySpace Plan (City of Chicago's Open Space Plan) is to attain a minimum of 2 acres of open space per 1,000 people for each of the 77 community areas, with a longer-term goal of 5 acres per 1000.

As demographics and populations shift within community areas, new parks are added to accommodate new residents and to reach the minimum open space goal. Presently, the primary concern of Chicago planners is to achieve equity in park access across the city, and so they aim to create neighborhood parks of at least 1 to 2 acres in size for communities that are lacking parks.

Chicago planners also take into account the proximity to public schools when seeking land for new parks. It is their goal to place parks near schools that are lacking open space so that students can utilize outdoor space for recreation and assignments. Through the Campus Park Program, the exteriors of more than 100 Chicago Public Schools were renovated, replacing outdated asphalt parking lots with park and recreational amenities.

In addition, the City of Chicago, Chicago Park District, and Forest Preserve District of Cook County provide leadership and financial support for a nonprofit called NeighborSpace, an organization that purchases vacant neighborhood lots, defunct railways, and river bank lands that have been converted into community gardens and green spaces by neighborhood groups. These smaller community spaces do not fit the traditional mold of typical Park District recreational spaces. NeighborSpace maintains ownership of these public community properties on behalf of neighborhood groups to protect them from future redevelopment.

NeighborSpace decides whether or not to acquire properties based on the possibility of long-term leadership in the community, the current owner's interest in selling or donating the land, the local need for the space, and the environmental assets of the property. In order to enter into an agreement with NeighborSpace, each property must have a community member who volunteers as the "NeighborSpace Site Manager," and also must enlist the cooperation of a "NeighborSpace Site Management Entity", a local nonprofit organization that is also committed to the project. In exchange for this

commitment, NeighborSpace provides basic liability insurance to people who tend and enjoy the site. This initiative is a unique example of how government agencies, community groups and local citizens can work together to provide effective stewardship for much-needed and beloved green spaces that are outside of the inventory of publicly owned parkland.

The Open Space Task Force should note these preceding examples and find other successes to guide them when updating the Open Space Element of the General Plan. Following successful practices in other cities will aid San Francisco in developing an Open Space Plan that considers future demographic shifts and the changing recreational needs that will accompany them. It is high time that the City develops tried-and-true standards to acquire, develop, and maintain sufficient open space for future generations.

CONCLUSION AND ACTION PLAN

San Francisco urgently needs a vision, a plan and new policies to address our open space shortage, maintenance and funding issues. The City presently has no open space plan, unlike Seattle, Boston, and many other cities. Until such a plan is developed, the City will be unable to provide its residents with equitable access to neighborhood parks, natural areas, playgrounds, and open spaces. And without this access, the “have nots” will miss out on the proven positive effect that parks have on personal and community health, and the economic health of the entire city.

STAKEHOLDERS MUST BE UNITED

Creating a new framework for guiding open space planning cannot happen without governmental leadership and community involvement. We salute Mayor Newsom for convening stakeholders from city agencies that are involved with open space, such as department heads from the Recreation and Park Department, the Department of Public Works, the Real Estate Department, the Public Utilities Commission, the Redevelopment Agency, the Housing Authority, the Port Authority, and the Unified School District, to participate in the Open Space Task Force.

The Task Force will meet together on a regular basis over approximately 12 months to share information and create a common vision for open space planning implementation in San Francisco. The Task Force will address funding strategies for both implementing the open space plan, as well as addressing maintenance needs.

The Task Force might also consider delegating certain tasks to a subgroup that includes civic leaders and neighborhood advocates. These local decision makers are directly connected to the needs of their communities and constituents, and their contributions to park planning on the neighborhood level could be an invaluable resource that must not be overlooked. Below the role of the civic leaders will be explained in greater detail.

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The city should launch a major public awareness campaign in order to garner popular support for the future work of the Task Force. The intended result is to establish a strong coalition of advocates invested in supporting the implementation of San Francisco’s Open Space Plan across the city.

Effective placement of media stories that champion the new Open Space Plan is key to this effort. In addition, the public awareness campaign might incorporate elements of successful campaigns from other cities, such as Open Space 2100 in Seattle, which brought citizens from civic, environmental, business, neighborhood and community groups together with planners with the task of “designing Seattle’s green network for the next century.” Seattle’s 18-month long initiative also included a two-day charrette and a series of public lectures and workshops to build interest and solicit ideas from

the general public for the planning process. As in Seattle, civic leaders and neighborhood groups in San Francisco should be given the opportunity to express their future vision for parks and recreation and to contribute to open space planning in the city.

SUGGESTED ACTION STEPS TOWARD OPEN SPACE EQUITY IN SAN FRANCISCO

The Action Steps below are meant to aid in the development of a comprehensive Open Space Plan via a multi-agency and multi-stakeholder process such as described above. This Open Space Plan must strengthen and improve San Francisco's process of acquisition, planning and coordination of parks, open space and recreation facilities, and must recommend the means to fund and maintain them as well.

- 1. Create an inventory of available public land and vacant private spaces.**
- 2. Create acquisition standards to fill gaps.** Acquisition standards and a timeline for meeting those standards must also be developed so that gaps in open space can be filled through targeted acquisitions. Standards should include the minimum acreage (per capita) that will be considered "acceptable" for the city in general, and for each neighborhood. Current population as well as projected demographic shifts in the future must be considered when establishing acquisition standards.
- 3. Clarify and update the City's General Plan to reflect the newly established standards.** Because the General Plan in its present form does not provide sufficiently strict guidelines for open space acquisition, portions of the General Plan and the Recreation and Open Space Element (now more than twenty years old) should be redrafted and updated. As the result of insufficient open space strategies, the City is currently creating new neighborhoods with few or no public amenities, such as parks, libraries and schools. The City Planning Department should establish public benefit zoning to ensure that our planning policies ensure the most essential quality-of-life features for those most in need.
- 4. Analyze PUBLIC property for open space and recreation potential at the District level.** As we have seen in this report, the transfer of public lands between city agencies has been one of the most successful open space acquisition methods applied in San Francisco in the past thirty years. For this reason, all public lands should be formally surveyed in order to analyze their potential as future parkland.

Public land can also be used to create wider, landscaped sidewalks, public right of ways, and center islands, as an immediate mechanism to 'green' neighborhoods while searching to find open space sites.

It would also be wise to create formal joint use agreements with agencies such as the Unified School District in order to share usage of resources and facilities, thereby creating new open space at minimal cost. Memorandums of understanding should be created with any private nonprofits or community groups that are able and willing to take responsibility for the management and maintenance of public land. This type of agreement would be particularly successful with regard to small neighborhood parks.

5. **Analyze PRIVATE property (existing and planned) for open space and recreation potential at the District level.** Formal fee structures and standards for both residential and commercial developers should be established to ensure that funds solely dedicated for park acquisition and development are maximized. Perhaps most importantly, fee collection and fund restrictions must be enforced, to discourage the repeated mismanagement and reallocation that have winnowed away our open space funds in the past.

Civic leaders and community advocates can contribute to this process by nominating private properties that would be appropriate for park development, as they are conscious of the needs of the local population.

6. **Develop a detailed funding strategy for land acquisition, development, and park maintenance.** The adequate maintenance of parks is an essential component of capitalizing on the value of open space. Consequently, a strategy to improve the funding for acquisition and maintenance of parks in San Francisco is also urgently needed. Strategies such as creating park benefit districts, the use of eminent domain, targeting willing sellers in park-deficient neighborhoods, and introducing bonds and levys to the voters should be investigated by studying best practices in other cities.
7. **Oversee and manage the long-term execution of the initiative.** Ideally the Task Force would continue to meet on a regular basis and provide leadership throughout the planning process to ensure the implementation and successful management of the new acquisition plan.

CONCLUSION

San Francisco's distinct topography and natural features make it an inimitable American city with unique open space issues. With land and real estate prices in the city hovering near their apex, it is not just a matter of finding adequate funding for park acquisition, but also carving out sufficient room for open space in planned developments and in neighborhood with gaps.

In this report NPC has tracked the history of open space legislation in San Francisco, and has reviewed successful acquisition and funding practices in other cities. We have examined the myriad public and personal benefits of urban open spaces in order to illustrate the importance of parks for all people in all neighborhoods of our city. Yet

our maps and data show that despite more than thirty years of purchases through the Open Space Fund, there are still major gaps in San Francisco's open space inventory, especially in neighborhoods in the eastern Districts of the city.

Parks and recreational facilities that are well maintained, well located and well funded are among the most valuable public amenities for urban areas, and San Francisco already boasts some of the most memorable open spaces in the country. Yet the current inequalities across the city with regards to access to green spaces and availability of some types of recreational facilities are further challenged by the incredible pace and density of new development. The huge influx of residents in areas surrounding Mission Bay, Rincon Hill, Hunters Point Shipyard, and other former industrial areas along the eastern shoreline and SOMA requires the most thoughtful and timely addition of parks and recreational facilities that will save future generations and define a quality of life.

The city will see a radical transformation of the skyline and population within twenty years. Considering this, time is of the essence to create new strategies and standards for open space acquisition to correct past disparities in the park system and to plan for future demographic shifts. Strong governmental leadership and cooperative planning between stakeholders is essential to the success and endurance of this initiative.

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PARKS BY THE NUMBERS

There are 7.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents in San Francisco.

3rd highest in U.S. among high-density cities (population: 739,426; total park acres: 5,773)

19.3 percent of total land area in San Francisco is parkland.

3rd highest percentage among high-density cities in U.S. (total land area of S.F is 29,884 acres; 5,773 acres is parkland)

San Francisco ranks third in total park-related spending per resident, by major city agency

\$147 per resident / \$108,521,592 total park expenditure in FY2004.

Total expenditure includes both operating and capital expenditure, but excludes stadiums, zoos, museums and aquariums.

New York City spends \$92 per resident.

Seattle spends \$266 per resident.

San Francisco ranks second in park-related total expenditure per resident, by city

\$252 per resident / \$186,484,899 total park expenditure in FY2005

San Francisco Recreation and Park Department employs 849 full time employees (or 1.15 FT employees for every 1,000 residents).

San Francisco ranked 11th in the nation in FY2006, with more employees per capita than Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Boston or Philadelphia.

Golden Gate Park is the third most visited park in U.S. (13,000,000 visitors per year)

San Francisco provides 144 playgrounds.

1.9 playgrounds per 10,000 residents in FY2005, ranking 30th in the nation.

San Francisco provides 27 dog play areas.

3.6 dog play areas per 100,000 residents in FY2005, ranking 2nd highest in the U.S.

San Francisco provides 32 Recreation Centers.

0.9 Centers per 20,000 residents in FY2006, ranking 23rd in the U.S.

San Francisco Park Capital Expenditures are \$51,223,474

\$69 per resident in FY2005, ranking 2nd highest in the U.S.

Capital expenditure does not include operating expenditure.

San Francisco Park Operating Expenditures are \$135,261,425

\$183 per resident in FY2005 and ranking *highest* in the U.S.

Operating expenditure does not include capital expenditure.

Parks are the most popular component of the Recreation and Parks Department.

In a 2004 survey, sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that they or someone in their household had visited an RPD facility in the last year.

The three RPD facilities visited most often are all parks or open space areas (Golden Gate Park, Crissy Field, and Mission Dolores Park.)

Yet, our city is not doing enough to provide equitable access to parks for all San Franciscans.

36.34 percent of the city's adult population is presently not being served by a neighborhood park within ¼ mile of their home, and 36.03 percent of children across the city are not being served by neighborhood parks.

In addition, playgrounds are not serving 32.83 percent of children across the city.

Presently, the San Francisco Planning code does not require private developers to create public parks in new residential developments.

The only open space required is "private usable open space", which can take the form of decks, balconies, porches and roofs.

**Statistics compiled by Trust for Public Land, Center for Park Excellence
(released 7/13/07.)**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Doesn't San Francisco already have an Open Space Fund for acquiring new parks?

San Francisco's efforts to save existing open spaces and create new parks go back over 30 years to the creation of the Open Space Fund in 1974. The Fund provides an annual set-aside of property taxes of 2.5 cents of every \$100 of assessed value. The Fund has earned \$334 million since it was established.⁴⁷ Its original disposition required that forty percent be spent annually on open space acquisition and development. Yet by 2000 an average of only \$400,000 was actually being spent annually on acquisitions⁴⁸ – as opposed to development (and excluding the 60 percent required for maintenance). Proposition C, approved by the voters in 2000, raised the acquisition bar to a minimum of five percent of the total fund, or about \$1 million per annum (property taxes vary from year to year), but the remainder is now almost all used for operation.

Q: How is it possible that the City of San Francisco has failed to acquire sufficient open space across the city in the past 30 years, despite legislation on the books and millions of dollars collected through the Open Space Fund?

Since the Open Space Fund was established, numerous budget crises have forced more and more operating costs into the Fund to the point that more than two thirds of it is now used for regular maintenance of parks and operation of various programs. After three decades, the total spent for acquisition amounts to only a little more than \$25 million, less than 10 percent of the total funds generated. The lion's share of Open Space funding has, over the years, become earmarked for operating costs and program administration.

In addition, the City also established a Downtown Park Fund in 1986 in order to secure parks in the dense downtown districts (C3 zones) at no cost to the taxpayers. The Fund collected approximately \$9.4 million, but to date this fund has purchased *no* property for green spaces—funds have instead been used to renovate existing parks or to build concrete plazas or indoor lobby spaces.

Ironically, one of the main reasons that San Francisco lags behind other cities in the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks is the creation, and subsequent misuse, of our Open Space Fund. To this day most San Franciscans believe that the fund is intended for acquiring open space. While the name of the fund was changed in 2000 to Park, Recreation and Open Space Fund to convey the broader purposes of these ear-marked tax dollars, the emphasis now is even less on open space acquisition than at any time in the last 30 years—even though the fund has more earmarked dollars for acquisition than ever before.

Q: Why do we need to create an Open Space Plan for SF?

⁴⁷ Subject to verification by the Recreation and Parks Department

⁴⁸ Subject to verification by the Recreation and Parks Department

There is currently no strategy of targeted acquisitions intended to serve those neighborhoods lacking parks and recreation facilities. There is no stated goal, or standard, for either open space in San Francisco generally or in each neighborhood specifically. And there is no comprehensive plan for open space acquisitions that coordinates the efforts of various parties developing parks under a broad vision of achieving equity in the distribution of open space in our city.

The Recreation and Open Space Element of the General Plan is the appropriate planning vehicle to provide that broad vision, but it was last updated in 1986. The neighborhood demographics that the original plan was based on are now more than 20 years old. The former Open Space Committee (a citizen's advisory committee) that was established in the 1970s to acquire open space was reconfigured in 2000 and no longer is focused solely on open space acquisition and park improvements. The new committee, Parks, Recreation and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC), lacks specific guidelines even regarding whether certain deficiencies in facilities such as playgrounds might also qualify as high need. Clearly, a new round of planning is in order.

Q: How has the city been affected by not having an open space plan?

For a number of years, the city has already been seeing the unfortunate consequences of the lack of coordination between real estate developers and open space advocates. Amazingly, the lofts developed in SOMA during the 1990s were exempted completely from all open space requirements and no parks were created in the neighborhoods where hundreds of these units were created.

Current development plans for the eastern corridor, the region of San Francisco identified by City Planning as having the greatest need for additional open space, are proceeding rapidly. Proposed new neighborhoods are being created at Rincon Hill, the Trans-Bay Terminal and Octavia Boulevard, but developers outside of those operating in Redevelopment Agency areas (i.e. Trans Bay) are still not required to provide parks and other recreation facilities in their plans. This puts these neighborhoods at great risk of becoming too dense for the enjoyable use of existing parks.

The Recreation and Park Department and City Planning need to be given a priority seat at the negotiating table regarding new development in order provide adequate and high quality parks in these areas and others to come. The Board of Supervisors has prioritized affordable housing for any available public land, a laudable goal; but no one wants to live in a neighborhood without parks – affordable or not.

Q: Which neighborhoods in San Francisco are the most lacking in open space?

The eastern side of the City, especially along the waterfront corridor from North Beach to the city border, is generally identified as a high-need area for open space. Much of the eastern bay shore was originally zoned industrial, and beginning in the 1990s, many of the former industrial buildings in this area were converted to residential lofts.

As the residential population in these areas has increased, the need for usable open space has also increased.

Supervisor District #3 (Financial District, Chinatown, North Beach neighborhoods) is the district with the fewest acres of parks/open spaces in San Francisco. Supervisor District #6, which covers the South of Market and Tenderloin neighborhoods, is a close runner up for open space shortage, even though more than five acres of open space have been added in this District through the Open Space Fund. (It is important to note that approximately 48 acres more will be added to District 6 when the Redevelopment Agency's Mission Bay project is completed.)

The Bayview District (Supervisor District #10), which boasts the largest children's population in the city, is almost as poor in usable green spaces and playgrounds. This is true despite the fact that the District 10 added the largest amount of open space (50.84 acres) of all the Districts through the Open Space Fund, and more park development is planned at Hunters Point in the near future (For Mission Bay and Hunters Point planned parks, see *Table 1*. Also, planned parks are highlighted in red on all maps in this report.)

Q: What are other cities doing about protecting and acquiring open space?

- Converting tax delinquency foreclosures to land or property for open space
- Specifying "Open Space Zone" requirements
- Purchasing land through local levy of special taxes
- Establishing park improvement districts
- Establishing landscape assessment districts
- Establishing public benefit zoning districts
- Requiring developers to acquire and develop public parks
- Open Space Tax
- Tax on Sporting Goods

Q: What are the open space requirements outlined in San Francisco's planning codes?

Neither the General Plan of the City of San Francisco nor the City Planning Code currently specify that developers must create publicly accessible parks in newly-developed residential zones of the city. Required open spaces can take the form of privately accessible space such as balconies, rooftop gardens, or rear yards, or common areas accessible only to residents.

Commercial developers building downtown are required to contribute to the Downtown Park Fund, which was created in 1986 to fund acquisition or development of open space in the densely built downtown area. Yet this fund has only been used for park renovations (Union Square) and land transfers and improvements of an existing park (Ferry Park)—it has not been used to acquire any new green spaces to date.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Bond

A certificate of ownership of a specified portion of a debt due to be paid by a government or corporation to an individual holder and usually bearing a fixed rate of interest.

Source: www.dictionary.com

Levy

An imposing or collecting, as of a tax, by a government, authority or force.

Source: www.dictionary.com

Neighborhood Park (definition adopted by Neighborhood Parks Council in 2006):

Description

A neighborhood park serves as a social and recreational focal point for the neighborhood and the basic unit of the San Francisco park system. It provides relief from the built environment for residents, and offers both passive and active (programmed and un-programmed) recreation in response to demographic and cultural characteristics of surrounding neighborhoods, with opportunities for interaction with nature. It is a destination largely accessible by foot, bicycle, or public transit within at least a quarter-mile radius from neighborhood residences, providing ease of access for young and senior adult users, while serving users of all ages. The site may host a range of facilities and amenities. Usually a stand-alone landscaped area, this type of park can also be located adjacent to a school or in a schoolyard to optimize resources to the benefit of the community.

Location and Access

The neighborhood park should be centrally located, if possible, within its service area and should be uninterrupted by non-residential roads or other physical barriers. The site should be generally flat and usable. It should be accessible by way of interconnecting trails, public transportation, sidewalks, or low-volume residential streets.

Size of Park

Neighborhood parks range in size from .5 acres to 30 acres.

Service Area

The neighborhood park primarily serves the local neighborhood located within a radius of 1/4 mile of the park, without physical or social barriers to the boundaries.

New Site Selection

Ease of access from the surrounding neighborhood, central location, and linkage to greenways are key concerns when selecting a new site in an identified high-need area. The site itself should exhibit the physical characteristics appropriate for both

active and passive recreation uses. Since one of the primary reasons people go to a park is to experience a pleasant outdoor environment, the site should exhibit some innate aesthetic qualities. “Left-over” parcels of land that are undesirable for development are not generally desirable for neighborhood parks.

Development

Neighborhood input should be used to determine the development or redevelopment plans for each park. Creating a sense of place by bringing together the unique characteristics of the site with the vision of the neighborhood is vital to successful design.

Support Amenities (Required)

- Park Signage (park name and relevant code signage)
- Turf area
- Perennial beds
- Benches
- Paths
- Dog bag dispensary and signage
- Trash can
- Trees
- Opportunity for at least one active use

Additional Support Amenities (Ideal)

Additional desirable amenities are determined on a community-by-community basis (this list is not meant to be exhaustive):

- Annual beds
- Lighting
- Informational kiosk
- Bathrooms
- Barbeque grills and picnic area
- Drinking fountain
- Trash receptacles, including recycling bins
- Bicycle parking
- Public art
- Recreation Center
- Clubhouse
- Swimming pool
- Children’s play area
- Athletic fields and courts
- Trails
- Undeveloped open space

Source: NPC/RPD joint definition

Mini Park

A park typically 0.5 acres or smaller, serving a neighborhood or part of a neighborhood; often a landscaped area with few facilities such as a community garden, a children's play area, or outdoor performance space.

Source: RPD Management Information System Division—data dictionary as of 6/21/04

Flagship Park

These parks serve a wide variety of city-wide recreational needs for both residents and tourists.

Source: District Park Planning

Regional Park

A park typically greater than 30 acres in size with a variety of park landscapes, facilities and programs for city residents, regional visitors, and tourists, or any park serving as a tourist destination of historical, cultural, or architectural significance.

Size: larger than 30 acres

Source: RPD Management Information System Division—data dictionary as of 6/21/04

Undeveloped Open Space

Undeveloped parks, generally with an emphasis on more natural landscapes as opposed to more horticultural landscaping. Recreational amenities often include paths, trails, and activities that link user and environment, but generally not sports fields. Often, these parks are considered Significant Natural Resource Areas and include beaches, wetlands, steep slopes, stream banks and rare plant and/or wildlife species or communities.

Source: District Park Planning

Civic Squares and Plazas

Area that is typically designated to attract citywide and regional visitors; a tourist destination; often entrenched in local culture and history; a gathering place for civic action, processions, and cultural events; could have a landscaped area, a children's play area, a decorative fountain, an underground garage, a concession, or public art.

SIZE: 0.5-30 acres

Source: RPD Management Information System Division—data dictionary as of 6/21/04

Recreation Center or Clubhouse Grounds/Athletic Fields and Sports Courts

Predominant use is for team or organized sports of all ages. Often, most of the site will be devoted to sports courts or athletic fields and there is generally a clubhouse or recreational center on site.

Source: District Park Planning

Greenscape

A landscaped park, often with a large un-programmed lawn, primarily for passive recreation.

Source: District Park Planning

Greenbelt

Landscaped strips along roadways, such as medians or forested walkways, which serve as linkages between parks or buffers between traffic and pedestrians or residential areas.

Source: District Park Planning

Stairway

Staircases landscaped to serve as open spaces

Source: District Park Planning

Specialty Park

Parks whose facilities are designed to serve a specific sport or activity. Includes community gardens, museums, boat ramps, fishing piers, athletic stadiums and senior centers.

Source: District Park Planning

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS COUNCIL FACT SHEET

Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) is a coalition of community-based park groups actively involved in improving neighborhood parks throughout San Francisco. In addition to technical assistance and organizing help to our network and new park groups, NPC provides a forum for sharing information and experience through coalition meetings and educational presentations and workshops with guest speakers and topic experts. Through these events, NPC strives to increase public and private support for, and commitment to, the restoration and improved maintenance of our neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities.

Since 1996, NPC has grown to include 120+ park groups and 4,000 park volunteers, establishing itself as San Francisco's premier park advocacy group. Our focus on a well-articulated mission and energetic agenda has inspired positive change within our city's parks.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

NPC galvanizes public awareness of, and involvement in, the major issues facing our neighborhood parks. Through our member meetings and special seminars, NPC brings city leaders and the community together to foster a shared vision for clean, safe, beautiful parks and quality recreation programs.

PARK ADVOCACY

Our clout as an advocacy group shows in the placement of the "Parks Package" on the March 2000 ballot responsible for securing a \$110 million bond to upgrade our neighborhood parks – the first citywide bond in over 50 years—and the renewal of the cherished Open Space Fund for another 30 years! We continue to actively campaign on behalf of our parks. Over the last ten years, our voice has been heard at over 300 city hearings.

EDUCATION

NPC helps park groups acquire the technical information and contacts they need to realize their goals. In addition, we provide a variety of forums through which San Franciscans can learn about their parks and plan for the improvement of these precious spaces. Through speaker programs, community members learn about myriad topics of interest to park advocates and city dwellers.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

NPC is dedicated to developing a strong working relationship between our community and the Recreation and Park Department. Through innovative projects such as **ParkScan.org**, NPC helps achieve standards of park maintenance generated by the city controller's office as well as provide city agencies with useful, accurate information about park conditions and community priorities.

PARK IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to the thousands of hours of volunteer labor NPC affiliate groups contribute in their parks, NPC launched the **Playground Campaign** to rebuild San Francisco's dilapidated playgrounds through community initiative that leverages city funds for playgrounds. With the help of the community and corporate sponsors, the campaign is creating safe, fun, cost-effective, destination playgrounds. NPC has also launched the **Blue Greenway** project to create a 13-mile trail for land and water recreation and enjoyment of nature along the southeastern waterfront.

For more information, visit www.sfnpc.org, or contact Neighborhood Parks Council by phone or email: (415) 621-3260, council@sfnpc.org.