

Nature in the City: Lake Merced

Discussion group led by Suzanne Gautier, PUC

Notes by Leah Skahen

Suzanne Gautier presented the group with a PUC draft of four possible scenarios for improvement on the Lake Merced watershed. All scenarios are part of a three-tiered plan to restore the watershed. The first phase addresses internal environmental and recreational problems within the 600-acre boundary of surface water and inlets. The second tier seeks to strengthen the connection between Lake Merced, Fort Funston, and Ocean Beach. Finally, the third tier of the conceptual plan calls for recapturing the lake's original 6,000-acre watershed extending north up Sunset Boulevard and east on Brotherhood Way.

The group discussed criteria for evaluation, particularly compatibility between and among various recreational activities and environmental resources, and weighed in on the relevance of different methods of evaluating the four possible scenarios. Efforts to protect activities that are historically popular or important at this site (e.g. large-vehicle operation training and skeet-shooting) greatly complicate the process as such activities typically conflict with a majority of other recreational interests. Scenario 1 proposes the least amount of change to the existing facilities, while scenario 4 would result in the most change and is favored by ecological advocates and experts. Scenario 2 seems to serve the greatest number of people.

Salient issues raised by participants:

First-impression concerns

- Quality of water run-off from neighboring golf courses
- Dry winters, low precipitation
- Decrepit, dangerous quality of trails
- Natural resource goals regarding recreation compatibility

How to strike a balance

- Are activities that are traditionally characteristic of the area mutually exclusive of conservation and other recreation?
- Does historic use translate to modern popularity or relevance?
- How do we define compatibility? (noise, pollution, hazard, or more abstract?)
- It is important to focus on developing external connections between Lake Merced, Fort Funston, Ocean Beach, etc. to promote creation of new open space in addition to simple renovation of existing open space

Looking forward

- In the upcoming decades, both driving and golf are predicted to become less and less popular; it's never too early to start thinking about acquiring parking lots and golf

courses and converting them to open space (e.g. Vancouver, B.C. Arboretum on former golf course land)

- Cap & trade developments can be used to generate capital to acquire golf course land
- In the short-term (i.e. until golf course acquisition is a real possibility), efforts should be made to “green” golf course land through wetland habitat and trails
- Public transportation should eventually be improved in anticipation of reduced driving and parking
- Concept plan captures issues of stormwater runoff, including plans to shrink wide low-traffic streets surrounding the lake itself, but the group expressed a want for more specific language in the plan addressing water management and quality in the entire 6,000-acre watershed: expanding existing treatment system, daylighting nearby creeks, etc.
- An environmental education element should be incorporated in the plan, with the Governor’s Outdoor Bill of Rights for Children as a potential model
- This area should remain very natural in appearance, as opposed to “constructed nature” to encourage the appreciation of this rare remnant of genuine, untainted natural habitat

The Lake Merced Task Force hopes to have a completed draft of an implementation and finance plan by February of 2009.

Nature in the City: Twin Peaks Bioregion

Discussion group led by Peter Brastow, Nature in the City

Notes by Karin Edwards

The Twin Peaks group discussed the key elements of a Conservation Vision for the Bioregion. The Bioregion is can be loosely defined as the “series of hilltops in the heart of the city, e.g., Mt. Davidson, Tank Hill, Corona Heights, as well as Glen Canyon, that are still rich with natural areas, wildlife habitats, and indigenous biodiversity.” The facilitator, Peter Brastow, identified the key elements of the Conservation Vision and Plan as: (1) Properties to acquire; (2) Properties to transfer to RPD; (3) Biological Importance; (4) Inventory of Natural Resources; (5) Recreational Amenities. Next, the group began to discuss the following question: “How do we optimize/strategize conservation in the Twin Peaks Bioregion?”

The group identified and discussed the following five key components of a Conservation Strategy for the Bioregion:

(1) Regional Buy-In

One member of the group, Ryan Branciforte (BAOSC), highlighted the fact that many of the parcels to be acquired in the Twin Peaks Bioregion have already been identified as regional priority conservation areas by the “Green Vision” planning process. He suggested capitalizing off of the work that has already been done (eg. Upland Habitat Goals and Green Vision) to garner more regional buy-in to protect these areas. (market as

a regional priority area) This could potentially help secure regional funding for acquisition and conservation.

(2) Pilot Project for Mapping Analysis

- facilitate mapping charrette (August 18th)
- create database, then cross reference with tools and strategies
- create map with all publicly-owned land

(3) Acquisition/Funding Strategies

- Create a Land Trust, similar to NeighborSpace in Chicago.
- Conservation Easements
- Look more closely at Planning Code and other legislation (potential reform)
- Acquire Aqua Vista site (market price is 1.2 million, assessed value = \$25,000)
- Use of the Open Space Fund?
- Other projects: Crestmont Hills Project (West Side of Mt. Sutro) should be incorporated into the Vision. MSWOA is the contact organization

(4) Interagency Cooperation and Collaboration

It was noted in the discussion that once property is handed over to or sold to the Recreation and Parks Department, it cannot be resold. RPD is the only agency that functions in this manner. However, RPD is hesitant to acquire or have any more land transferred to them because they do not have the capacity to maintain more parks and open space. It was suggested, then, that bringing all open space in the city under one authority (ex: Chicago's Parks District) will be instrumental in the prioritization of open space in not only the Twin Peak area, but the whole of San Francisco.

Entities that own land in the bioregion: PUC, RPD, Laguna Honda, UCSF, private, SFSUD (7th and Lawton site), others?

(5) Recreational Uses

- Recreation is a key element to protect
 - Trails route people away from habitat sensitive areas
 - key element for funding – creates stewards
- Trails: How can we integrate the Ridge Trail into this Master Plan?

Green Corridors: Connecting Golden Gate Park with the Presidio
Discussion group led by Greg DiPaolo
Notes by Carissa Look

This group was presented with a map of San Francisco and the mission of

connecting Golden Gate Park with the Presidio using several green improvements. These improvements were: Bike Lanes, Bike Paths, Boulevards, Civic Boulevards, Green Connector Streets, Greenbelt, Greenway, Living Street, Pedestrian Walkway, Street Beautification Area, Street Furniture, Streetscape, Traffic Calming.

Small strips of paper, which the group moved around the map as they saw fit, represented green improvements. This activity allowed the group to envision a green connector network using concrete visuals, avoiding the difficulties presented by abstraction.

Vision for Connection

- Street Furniture
 - Appropriate for merchant corridors
 - Geary too busy for furniture
 - Locations
 - Geary and Arguello
 - Clement and Arguello
 - Geary and Park Presidio
 - 24th and Geary
- Bike Route Network
 - Bike routes were envisioned that took a stepladder approach to connecting Golden Gate Park to the Presidio. These routes are located
 - Along the length of 34th Ave
 - Along Balboa from the ocean to its intersection with 25th Ave
 - Along Cabrillo east from its intersection with 25th Ave to its intersection with Arguello Blvd
 - Along the length of 25th Ave
 - Along 8th Ave from its intersection with JFK Boulevard in Golden Gate Park to its intersection with Cabrillo
 - Along the length of Arguello Blvd
- Major greening projects
 - Several routes were identified as having the greatest potential and need for green connections. These routes and their proposed improvements are as follows:
 - 25th Ave
 - Traffic Calming
 - Green Connector Street
 - Street Furniture
 - Bike Lanes

- Park Presidio Blvd Area
 - Traffic Calming along Park Presidio Blvd
 - Street Furniture along Park Presidio Blvd
 - Pedestrian Walkway along Arguello Blvd
- Arguello Blvd
 - Traffic Calming
 - Class 1 Bikeway
 - Green Connector Street
 - Street Furniture
 - Pedestrian Walkway
- Connection between Park Presidio Blvd Greening and Arguello Greening
 - Civic Boulevard along Clement from its intersection with 20th Ave to its intersection with Arguello

Useful Tools for the Next Mapping Exercise

- Map of Paper Streets/Unimproved Rights of Way
 - Streetparks.com?

General Findings

- Traffic calming should run parallel to existing major thoroughfares

Green Corridors: Connecting Golden Gate Park with the Lake Merced

Discussion group led by

Notes by Molly Bucshieb

The Downtown: POPOS

Discussion led by George Williams, SPUR

Notes by Kristal Ip

Privately owned public open spaces – or POPOS – are an invaluable asset to San Francisco’s downtown district, which is infamous for being high on density and low on open space. Already, 65 POPOS are scattered around downtown, where they are located inside, behind, in front of, or on top of buildings. These pockets of open space can provide areas of relief from a packed, urban environment, giving visitors opportunities to relax or recreate. One major issue though for San Francisco’s POPOS is that they are not commonly known or used. Therefore their potential to benefit the public is stagnated, and future developers may have no motivating reasons to include POPOS in any building plans.

The workgroup mainly focused on how to increase public use of POPOS, which is strongly related to public knowledge of POPOS – if people don’t know they exist, they will never use them. Street signs, maps, and an informational website are just a few ways to boost visibility.

Another issue for POPOS is encouraging private developers to build them. The group discussed how rigorous, enforceable development requirements can promote POPOS construction. Additionally, if economic feasibility is a concern for developers, they can be given the opportunity to form revenue-generating CBDs that can assist with maintenance and operating costs.

San Francisco is home to 65 POPOS, but not many people know about them...

- In order to change this, we need to increase access, visibility, and use.

Methods for raising awareness and use:

- Create a POPOS tour for City Guides to present
- Create brochures
- Create and manage a website
 - o Include special information and maps
- Clarify when POPOS are open and closed
- Create better and more welcoming signs
- Create a recognizable logo that can be used to quickly identify POPOS locations
- Increase the number of open hours (i.e., not only during business hours)

Keep in mind that two key factors to producing successful POPOS are ACCESS and the PUBLIC...

How can we motivate private owners to construct and make available open spaces for the public?

- One major issue is the cost related to maintaining POPOS
 - o If formed, CBDs would be able to provide funds for POPOS operations and maintenance
 - o The Chamber of Commerce would house CBD activity
- Change requirements for new developments

- Update to require public benefit POPOS construction
- Encourage better landscaping
- Recognize outstanding successful POPOS: Give awards?

How can we enforce development policies and ensure that POPOS are built?

- Train planners to better understand how building design can or cannot benefit the public
- Create environmental sustainability guidelines

Methods for raising awareness and use, part 2:

- Activate “dead” zones near POPOS
 - Extend weekday events to weekends
 - Try to maximize attendance at weekday events: Increase publicity
- Physical denotations of the POPOS network
 - Sidewalk medallions or arrows
 - Include the locations of rooftop POPOS

Next steps:

- Form a “Friends of the POPOS” non-profit organization to manage and/or coordinate publicity, website, events, etc for all POPOS

