



Meeting the Open Space Challenges of the Future *COMMUNITY WORKSHOP SERIES*

Russian Hill/North Beach

March 16, 2009 ~ 6-8 pm ~ Joe DiMaggio Rec. Center

Hosted by: Telegraph Hill Dwellers, North Beach Neighbors, & the Russian Hill Improvement Association

Approximate number of attendees: 28

AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

- Meredith Thomas, Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC)

Opening up the workshop, Meredith Thomas of the Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) greeted the participants and thanked Supervisor Chiu for coming to speak to the group.

WELCOME & OVERVIEW OF OPEN SPACE IN SAN FRANCISCO: Why it Matters

- Meredith Thomas, NPC

- Supervisor David Chiu, Board of Supervisors President

Next, Meredith reviewed the City's effort to address the challenges of Open Space in San Francisco through the Mayor's Open Space Task Force launched in 2007. She noted that the Neighborhood Parks Council has been partnering with the San Francisco Planning Department, Recreation & Parks Department, City Hall, and the Board of Supervisors in order to examine the future of open space in the City. She then described the key outcomes of this outreach phase of the task force:

- 1) Garnering public ideas and vision to incorporate in a long-term (100 year) Vision Plan for Open Space in San Francisco;
- 2) Creating a ranked priority list of the public's views on what open space issues are most important to tackle and in what order;
- 3) Publishing an Action Plan for the next 5-10 years with all the best ideas from our workshops and from online participation.

Meredith elaborated on the Action Plan, noting that NPC is working in conjunction with the City Planning Department to come up with a strategy and process to help enable the community driven projects that have emerged as a result of the Open Space Framework's public participation efforts. In summarizing the overview of open space in San Francisco, she mentioned that the Neighborhood Parks Council has been actively engaging a variety of neighborhood groups in order to ensure comprehensive representation in the ongoing workshop series.

Following her review of open space in San Francisco, Meredith invited David Chiu, the President of the Board of Supervisors, to come up and address the workshop participants. Supervisor Chiu greeted the group and thanked NPC for putting on the workshop. He then mentioned the difficulty in dealing with parks and open space in the area given the fact that it is extremely dense. With that said, he noted that the area has a very informed citizenry with a number of different options available to them about how to proceed with open space planning in the future, and that it is important that the participants consider different opinions when discussing open space. Supervisor Chiu reiterated that the City is facing its most extreme budget shortage in a very long time, and that while people need to prioritize where cuts in service should be made, they should also take the opportunity to think about where new capital investments could be made as well.

POLICY FRAMEWORK: ROSE

- Sue Exline, S.F. Planning Department

Sue Exline of the San Francisco Planning Department next spoke about the Department's revision of the Recreation & Open Space Element (ROSE) of the City's General Plan. The ROSE, written in 1986, is comprised of over-arching objectives related to open space that have a set of associated policies for each objective. The newest version aims to have actionable and specific implementation steps linked to each policy that are universal across agencies. During her presentation, Sue noted that the reason for initiating the update is that the current version is out of date and consequently lacks the status it should have as a strong, guiding policy document for the City. Community input on the revised policies and implementation steps of the ROSE is strongly desired. She mentioned that since so many people in Russian Hill, North Beach, and the surrounding neighborhoods are engaged in their neighborhood, one aspect of the current effort is to also work on ways in which community involvement can be made easier. She then summarized her presentation by mentioning the City's goal of establishing a 5-10 Year Action Plan along with a 100-year Vision Plan for Open Space; both of these documents will utilize the information gathered in the community workshop series. The City aims to have the final draft of the ROSE revision ready for review by late spring of 2009.

Upon completion of Sue's presentation, a question was asked noting that the current effort to update the ROSE was initiated during a completely different economic environment, and as such would the current situation have an effect on the process. In response, Sue restated that the ROSE update is meant to be a long term planning effort, so it is important to think beyond the recent economic downturn. She then went on to say that financial resources are almost always constrained when it comes to funding parks and open space in San Francisco, so the effort is an opportunity to come up with some creative solutions to manage this issue.

BREAK-OUT SESSION: Process & Outcomes

- *Dee Dee Workman, Host*

Following the Policy Framework presentation, Host Dee Dee Workman briefly provided instructions for the workshop's breakout session and reminded the group about the value of their input. She requested that the participants fill out the feedback materials and then prompted group discussion by having each table explore the following central questions:

- "What are the most successful parks and open spaces in your neighborhood?"
- "What are some ways that people can help improve parks and open spaces in your neighborhood?"

Additionally, Dee Dee requested that each table reserve roughly 20 minutes at the end of their conversation in order to distill their top five priorities for open space as a group, both in their neighborhood *and* in the City, from a list of options that had been provided.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION: Challenges & Opportunities vis a vis Open Space in San Francisco

Break-out Session

During this time, each table engaged in a dynamic, free-flowing discussion that responded to the two central questions, while also raising other issues about open space in the neighborhood and the city. The major concepts/ideas that emerged from the discussion were selected by each table to discuss with the larger group.

Distill Priorities

For this portion of the workshop, each table came to consensus on their top priorities for open space and then recorded these on Open Space Priorities form that had been provided.

REPORT BACK: Top 5 ideas/priorities presented from each group

- *Dee Dee Workman, Host*

A representative from each table shared the main ideas and priorities from their group. The comments from each table are listed below:

Table 1

Major concepts from discussion

- Work on creating a coalition of groups or individuals to focus on acquiring and maintaining all of the parks and open spaces in the District.
- Develop publicly-owned land along the waterfront into open space for recreational usage.
- "Don't let the voters down" at 701 Lombard – the land is classified as open space and it should stay that way.
- Work on increasing/promoting rooftop gardens (i.e. on the proposed Joe DiMaggio Library) – this is a way to create a lot of new open space.
- Prioritize developing certain right-of-ways into linear parks – can also be done on a temporary basis (i.e. Grant Ave. during the day, allowing deliveries in the evenings).
- Improving general maintenance of existing parks is a primary concern.
- The City should look into buying houses or lots that are currently for sale with the intent of returning these properties back into open space – one method for doing so would be to establish land banking or a land trust.

Priorities – Neighborhood

1. Other: Create a powerful coalition of people that acquire open space in the area
2. Develop publicly-owned land along the waterfront into open space
3. Other: Make sure to use land classified as parks/open space as actual open space
4. More amenities & activities to serve the needs of the community – especially utilize rooftop gardens
5. Develop existing public right-of-ways into linear parks
6. General maintenance

Priorities – Citywide

No Citywide priorities provided

Table 2

Major concepts from discussion

- Given the current economic conditions (slowdown in development), it is a good time to push/fight for remaining open space opportunities in the neighborhood (vacant lot on Telegraph Hill Blvd. is a notable example).
- Washington Square is a great open space, but it conflicted in terms of who is served by it (i.e. doesn't serve kids/families well) – *reflects the general lack of open space in the neighborhood.*
- *A major concern is that* in addition to a general lack of open space, the area's parks/facilities are also poorly maintained and overdue for renovations.
- Given the lack of open space in the neighborhood, maximize any alternative opportunities for creating new open spaces – some major examples include land along the waterfront, temporary or permanent street closures (i.e. Vallejo/Grant, Powell/Union, Mason St. between Powell & Union), underutilized PUC lands, and general improvements to stair cases or other pedestrian connections (i.e. Kearny/Montgomery).
- Work on increasing the amount/quality of lighting in neighborhood parks – safety is a concern in many of them.

Priorities – Neighborhood

1. General Maintenance
2. Renovations to existing parks
3. Safety
4. Develop existing public right-of-ways into linear parks
5. Open schoolyards for public access
5. Develop publicly-owned land along the waterfront into public open space

Priorities – Citywide (*specific order not stated*)

- Develop publicly-owned land along the waterfront into open space
- Better access to parks (ped., bike, transit)
- Acquire new open space in neighborhoods with a deficit
- Increase open space for sports fields
- Other: Develop a grand civic/public open space along the Embarcadero (similar to Millennium Park in Chicago)

Table 3

Major concepts from discussion

- Make the best possible use of existing resources – increase safety (makes parks more welcoming; examine gaps in *programming and work* to meet the needs; *focus on improving* maintenance; emphasize sustainability.
- Prioritize street greening and tree planting.
- Improve under-utilized spaces to increase usage – i.e. Francisco Reservoir, Hyde/Vallejo Mini Park (this makes the space a liability), Helen Willis (serves neighborhood but needs beautification), Conrad Park.
- A lack of available space causes conflict between people and dogs – existing rules should be better enforced.
- *Emphasize usage* of public art – should be appropriate to the place/space it is in.
- Sterling Park needs to be more versatile – *programming* is limited.
- Prioritize green space over pavement *when programming parks*.
- Consider implementation of taxing mechanisms *to improve parks* – this is supported if it works with an economy of scale and provides a range of benefits, it also needs to be well policed/managed.
- *Consider turning underutilized space along the waterfront into open space* – could attract boaters and bring in money.
- Consider installing round-a-bouts at intersections of Mason & Chestnut and Mason & Lombard.

Priorities – Neighborhood (*specific order not stated*)

- Renovations to existing parks
- General maintenance
- Safety
- Open schoolyards for public access
- Develop open space for food production

Priorities – Citywide

No Citywide priorities provided

NEXT STEPS & CLOSING

Staying Involved

Meredith Thomas from the Neighborhood Parks Council noted that the bridges between tonight's meeting and the implementation of the 100 year Vision Plan for open space in San Francisco are initiating a number of community-driven projects to improve and maintain open space in the City. Furthermore, the information gathered throughout the course of the workshop series will be made available to the public, providing them with an excellent advocacy tool for increasing awareness and securing funding for neighborhood projects. She specifically referred to the Community Challenge Grant Program, which provides up to \$100,000 several times a year; and the 2008 Neighborhood Parks Bond, which includes a \$5 million Community Opportunity Fund for neighborhood parks projects. Meredith also mentioned that NPC and other community organizations can act as a fiscal sponsor to neighborhood groups inspired to enhance their local open space; some examples of projects include greening a street median or starting a community garden.

Meredith then addressed concerns about the funding issues at the Recreation & Parks Department, stating that while there is an urgent need for certain changes, the workshop series is part of a long term planning effort and that the community must be careful not to make rash decisions regarding open space in San Francisco given the precarious state of the economy.

Meredith also reviewed the 'Meeting in a Box' - a handout created to have meeting attendees take back to their friends and neighbors to hold a conversation about open space issues in their neighborhood and in San Francisco, and set priorities for limited resources. Input captured by these small group discussions will be integrated with data and ideas gathered at the larger workshops and used to inform the ROSE update and the Action Plan. In addition to the 'Meeting in a Box' exercise, workshop participants were asked to visit the Open Space 2100 website and take the online survey. Available at www.openspacesf.org/survey, the survey collects individual priorities and values regarding open space in San Francisco, and is a very valuable source of information for the aforementioned plans. Meredith also noted that participants would be able to access these meeting notes on the Open Space 2100 website.

Closing Remarks

Meredith Thomas thanked the workshop participants for coming, and the Neighborhood Parks Council staff for their hard work in putting on the community workshop. She also thanked the Russian Hill Improvement Association, North Beach Neighbors, and Telegraph Hill Dwellers for their help in organizing the workshop. In addition, Meredith expressed thanks to Sue Exline of the Planning Department and Dee Dee Workman for their involvement, and to David Chiu for taking the time to address the group.