



SoMa

March 18, 2009 ~ 6-8 pm ~ The Arc of SF

Hosted by: SoMa Leadership Council

Approximate number of attendees: 16

AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

- Jim Meko, SoMa Leadership Council

Opening up the workshop, Jim Meko of the SoMa Leadership Council greeted the participants and thanked the Neighborhood Parks Council and Department of City Planning for putting on the community workshop. Jim then announced that the SoMa Leadership Council typically meets on the 3rd Wednesday of every month at the Arc of SF (180 11th St.). The SoMa Leadership Council's purpose is to engage residents in an open and productive discussion of planning issues in the south of Market area. Jim went on to point out the importance of conducting the Open Space Workshop in SoMa because of the significant need for open space and parks in that part of the city.

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

- Isabel Wade, Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC)

Next, Isabel Wade of the Neighborhood Parks Council thanked the participants for coming and then proceeded to explain the importance of having a discussion about Open Space. She noted that while there is an abundance of parks in San Francisco, they are not evenly spread throughout the City. As a result of this, Isabel mentioned that the City is still a long way from the goal of having every resident be within a 10-minute walk of a greenspace. She also mentioned that the Neighborhood Parks Council is looking for projects to take on related to parks and open space, and that the participants' ideas and input about their neighborhood were extremely valuable. In summarizing the overview of open space in San Francisco, Isabel again underscored the fact that while some parts of the City have sufficient amounts of public open

space and well-maintained facilities, others are severely lacking and overall maintenance is a challenge in any neighborhood. She highlighted this issue by pointing out that the Recreation & Parks Department's budget has been cut seven times in 10 years.

After this brief overview, Isabel 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 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.

POLICY FRAMEWORK: ROSE

- Sarah Dennis Phillips, S.F. Planning Department

Sarah Dennis Phillips 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, Sarah 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 as the City is looking to incorporate new ideas into the document. Sarah specifically mentioned the importance of community involvement in the SoMa area since it has recently experienced a dramatic increase in density. She then reflected on Isabel Wade's earlier point about the goal of being within a 10 minute walk of a greenspace, saying that the Planning Department intends to go further by making sure that every resident is within a 10 minute walk of several different types of open spaces, in order to meet everyone's recreational needs. Sarah also brought up a few examples of planning efforts that have been proposed or are slated for implementation in SoMa in the near future. Specifically, she mentioned the planned conversion of Minna and Natoma streets into 'green alleys', and the proposed transition of Folsom St. into a 'green' or 'livable' street as well.

Finally, Sarah 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. The current draft and policies are available for review on the City's website (<http://openspace.sfplanning.org/>).

Following Sarah's presentation, a few questions were asked by the workshop participants. The first was in regards to the open space requirements for new high rises being developed in the area. In response, Sarah mentioned that some requirements currently exist, and that the recently completed Eastern Neighborhoods Plan has new requirements for open space as well. A follow-up comment was made on the subject by a participant, stressing that the current open space requirements do not necessarily guarantee that a 'park' will be built, which is a major

issue. They mentioned that currently developers are able to just do some generic greening, build roof gardens or privately owned public open spaces within their developments and have it count towards open space requirements. The problem with this is that these spaces are not the same as well programmed, open, and accessible public parks, which is what the neighborhood desperately needs.

Another question was asked about the nature of the Planning Department's involvement with the Better Streets Plan. To this Sarah responded that City Planning was working with MTA in order to cut some of the red tape and get the plan approved so that it can begin to take effect.

BREAK-OUT SESSION: Process & Outcomes

- *Kelly Quirke, Host*

Following the Policy Framework presentation, Host Kelly Quirke briefly provided instructions for the workshop's breakout session and reminded the group about the value of their input. He 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, Kelly 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

- Kelly Quirke, 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

- Maintenance must be promoted comprehensively – it needs to be prioritized from the beginning with appropriate funding and resources committed to it.
- Due to the limited amount of open space in SoMa, it is crucial that the programming needs of the surrounding community are met.
- The neighborhood has a dilemma between acquiring new space versus making the most of what currently exists – both are important.
- There are no off-leash dog parks in District 6 – this is indicative of a general lack of space in which neighbors can interact and develop communal bonds (more facilities for children/families achieves this as well).

Priorities – Neighborhood (*specific order not stated*)

- More amenities & activities to serve the needs of the community
- General maintenance – prioritize this from funding to follow through
- Safety
- Acquire new open space in neighborhoods with a deficit
- Other: work on improving the capacity of existing infrastructure/facilities – i.e. make crosswalks wider.

Priorities – Citywide (*specific order not stated*)

- Renovations to existing parks
- General maintenance
- Better access to parks (ped., bike, transit)
- Other: address the misuse & abuse of parks/facilities (i.e. vandalism *and* not picking up dog waste, etc.)

Table 2

Major concepts from discussion

- The neighborhood needs to have a vision for its *network* of parks.
- Work on serving under-represented constituents better – i.e. seniors, daytime workers, women, etc.
- Safety is a major concern in the neighborhood.
- *Successful parks are those that are accessible* – open and well lit.
- Make it easier for volunteers to participate *in stewardship of parks*.
- There needs to be better coordination of activities and communication between the staff of various City agencies.

Priorities – Neighborhood

1. Acquire new open space in the neighborhood
2. Other: get input from the community about its needs
3. Develop new recreational facilities
4. General maintenance & safety – *the two are interrelated*
5. Renovations to existing parks

Priorities – Citywide

1. Renovations to existing parks
2. Develop publicly-owned land along the waterfront into open space
3. Other: get input from the community about its needs
4. General maintenance & safety – *the two are interrelated*
5. Develop/protect recreational facilities

NEXT STEPS & CLOSING

- Isabel Wade, NPC

Staying Involved

Isabel Wade from the Neighborhood Parks Council mentioned 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 the parks, plazas, green streets, and open spaces and keeping meeting participants active in sustaining our investment in open space even through times of economic scarcity. She specifically referred to the Community Challenge Grant Program, which provides up to \$100,000 several times a year; the 2008 Neighborhood Parks Bond, which includes a \$5 million Community Opportunity Fund for neighborhood parks projects; and the Park, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC), which is an additional source for the acquisition of open space. Isabel also mentioned that NPC and other community organizations can act as a fiscal sponsor to neighborhood groups inspired to enhance their local open space; projects could include greening a street median or starting a community garden. In summarizing this point, she reminded participants of the need to convince elected officials about the importance of open space issues.

Isabel then 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. Isabel also noted that participants would be able to access these meeting notes on the Open Space 2100 website.

Before moving on to closing remarks, a participant asked about the process through which the new ROSE is written. In response, Isabel noted that the comments gathered at the community workshops would be fed into the second draft of the ROSE. In following up on their question, the participant then asked why the first draft had been written before gathering public input. Isabel agreed that this was an excellent point and suggested that participants take time to examine the actual changes being made to the ROSE. Any additional questions on the subject can be addressed to Sue Exline at the Planning Department, her email is susan.exline@sfgov.org.

Closing Remarks

Finally, Isabel thanked the participants for coming, and the Neighborhood Parks Council staff for their hard work in putting on the community workshop. She also thanked Sarah Dennis Phillips of the Planning Department for attending, and Jim Meko and the SoMa Leadership Council for hosting the workshop.

Jim Meko then addressed the floor, thanking the participants for attending, and the NPC and Planning Department for coming to talk to about parks and open space in SoMa.

