



NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS COUNCIL

FRIENDS OF LAFAYETTE PARK BOND OVERVIEW MEETING

Notes

October 23, 2008 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
Stuart Hall High School, 1715 Octavia St.

**Please note, due to limited staffing, parts of these notes may be incomplete; however, we have tried to capture as best we can the overall nature of the discussion.*

I. Opening & Welcome: *Kim Barnes and Art Persyko, Friends of Lafayette Park (FOLP)*

- Kim welcomed meeting attendees on behalf of FOLP and encouraged people to become active with the park group.
- Art provided an overview of the meeting, noting that one of the goals was for attendees to hear from the Recreation and Parks Department (RPD) about the 2008 Neighborhood Parks Bond (Bond) process, timelines and, specifically, about what will happen at Lafayette. Art noted that while the planning and renovations of the park are still several years away, it is important to start a thoughtful dialog now and for RPD to connect with the community surrounding the park. Art noted that Meredith Thomas of the non-profit Neighborhood Parks Council (fiscal sponsor for FOLP) would help facilitate Q&A and feedback to RPD at the meeting.

II. RPD Bond Presentation: *Dawn Kamalanathan, Planning Director for RPD*

- Art introduced Dawn Kamalanathan, Planning Director for RPD to provide an overview of the bond and what the Lafayette portion will entail. Dawn and the planning department responsible for development of the bond project for RPD including translating the physical assessments of parks into a ranked list from which the bond projects were identified and for creating the associated timeline and basic budgets for each section of the bond (see http://www.sfgov.org/site/recpark_page.asp?id=64140 for detailed park bond information)
- Dawn introduced Steven Cismowski, RPD Neighborhood Services Area Manager for a large number of neighborhood parks, including providing direct oversight to the staff at Lafayette Park on an interim basis and therefore oversight of the day- to -day needs of the park. Dawn also introduced Rhoda Parhams, Capital Program Manager for RPD. Rhoda's division essentially executes the capital projects (such as oversight and contractor management for playground renovations) in conjunction with the timeline and scope established with the planning division and is responsible for the delivery of projects. Her team will become most active when detailed construction planning and execution begin for the bond project at Lafayette Park
- Dawn provided a brief overview of the bond planning process RPD used leading up to voter approval in February of 2008 (the bond report can be downloaded here: http://www.sfgov.org/site/recpark_page.asp?id=64140)

- Dawn referred attendees to page 38 of the bond report which provides the detail on the Lafayette project and noted that per RPD's timeline, official planning will begin at the end of 2009 and that construction is due to occur from late 2011 to early 2013 and that the escalated budget for the project are as follows: \$10,200,000 for the whole park (escalated from 2007 dollars and with contingencies) with \$5,925,034 for site work such as irrigation, lighting and pathways, \$786,000 for a new play structure, \$301,457 for buildings and \$7,012,900 for construction. Dawn noted that unlike the 2000 parks bond that fell short of expectations, this bond is structured such that the parks named for receiving funds will receive improvements- there are 12 parks Citywide specifically named in the bond.
- Dawn noted that RPD will conduct a public outreach component to the formal planning process and that ideas or concerns raised at this meeting will be folded into the planning as it begins.
- Meredith Thomas of NPC noted that of the \$185 Million in the bond, \$33.5 Million is allocated for waterfront park projects and that there are several special bond projects, including \$ 11.4 M for restroom repair and replacement, \$5M for trails, \$4M for trees and \$5M for a community opportunity grant fund. Meredith also noted that bonds are a very expensive way to finance capital work in the City and so forming this early partnership with RPD is important as it will help ensure a result the community is happy with.

III. Bond & Park Discussion: *Meredith Thomas, NPC, facilitator Dawn Kamalanathan, Planning Director for RPD, Rhoda Parhams, RPD Capital Program Manager, Steven Cismowski, RPD Neighborhood Services Area Manager*

- Meredith facilitated a question and answer period of the meeting in which bond questions and ideas along with general park issues were brought up by meeting attendees.
- QUESTION: How will the park's retaining walls and irrigation system be addressed in the bond? ANSWER: Dawn replied that retaining walls and irrigation are core priorities system-wide and the need for addressing these aspects of each park will be identified through assessments.
- QUESTION: Some parks have been renovated in a way that much more cement and hardscape has been added. Will this renovation retain the green in our park? ANSWER: Dawn noted that the renovation at Union Square is different as it is a plaza, not a park so the use of hardscape is different. Steven noted that Lafayette is a unique urban park and he is interested in preserving the style of the park while addressing ADA requirements- he does not want measures required to bring the park into code to be executed in a manner that is in conflict with the design of the park.
- QUESTION: There is an existing retaining wall that is crumbling and is supposed to be taken care of- what is the status of that? ANSWER: Rhoda stated that there are funds and the project is expected to get underway and be done by the end of 2008. The plan now for the wall is to take it down, create a new wall that has pockets around the existing palm trees. QUESTION: How will the palm trees remain structurally sound if the design of the wall is changed in that way? ANSWER: Rhoda indicated RPD will be considering the stability of the historic palms during the project.
- QUESTION: Does the bond allow for increased staffing? ANSWER: Dawn noted the bond is for capital work and it is unclear where the City/RPD budget will be when these projects finish to allow for staffing increases. RPD would like to investigate long-term financing options.
- QUESTION: Does RPD have a partnership for volunteer training so that there are more frequent opportunities for people to work in their park? Not everyone can work on a Saturday morning and drop-in volunteering would increase the amount of work volunteers can do. ANSWER: Meredith noted that developing a volunteer certification program so that volunteers can be trained and then work independently in their park has long been a priority for NPC but that such a program does not

really exist aside from some casual gardener/volunteer arrangements people work out independently.

- QUESTION: Recently, a portion of the sprinkler system on a hill was broken, was not fixed and began to cause an increasing problem with mud. A volunteer offered to fix it and was told no. What can we do to address problems we see in our park that go unaddressed and worsen? ANSWER: Steven stated that he is aware of the issue and that it will be fixed within the month and has to do with a pipe, not the sprinkler head.
- STATEMENT: The hill area behind the tennis courts frequently has needles and condoms dumped. The design of that part of the park lends itself to misuse.
- QUESTION: Specifically, how will the community be involved in the design process? ANSWER: Dawn suggests continued check in meetings like this one and several years from now to have a more specific discussion and pick priorities.
- QUESTION: How does ADA Compliance work in the redesign? ANSWER: Rhoda noted that the park will need to be ADA accessible and have barrier removal in conjunction with the renovations- this may include low-rise stairs, rerouting a pathway to the restroom. Rhoda stated a desire to see the esthetic/ design style remain the same and to blend the ADA updates in with the renovation in a manner consistent with the look of the park.
- QUESTION: A portion of the park has water pouring out heavily onto the ground during irrigation. Can this be replaced with something more efficient? ANSWER: Steven replied that portions of the irrigation system are 'antique' and will be updated. Rhoda noted that RPD is trying to develop standards system-wide for things like irrigation so maintenance and replacement of parts is easier.
- QUESTION: How does bond reporting work? ANSWER: Meredith noted that the bond report can be found online and that the subsequent bond accountability report can also be found online (http://www.sfgov.org/site/recpark_page.asp?id=64140) for the first portion of the bonds which have already been sold- just over \$40 M. Meredith noted that the bonds for these park projects will be sold in three bundles. Dawn explained that the City does not want to issue all of the bond debt at once, so the process is to issue a portion, spend it down and then issue more.
- STATEMENT: FOLP has more than 250 people involved, with a growing number of parents. I would be a shame to see a big, plastic cookie-cutter playground in such an elegant park. Within FOLP, there are parents who are interested in organizing themselves to have input on the playground.
- Rhoda Parhams recommends that people look at examples of recent RPD projects to get a sense of how playgrounds have been done in different parks (To view samples, please see: http://parks.sfgov.org/site/capimp_index.asp?id=91569 or navigate from <http://www.parks.sfgov.org> then...Click on the Capital Improvement tab menu on the right side of the page Scroll down to "Capital Projects" (just below the picture of Upper Noe Rec Center) Click on the feature: "2006 to Present Play Structures and Play Areas")
- Meredith noted to the group that this bond has less than \$800,000 for a play structure at the park and many playgrounds build in San Francisco now cost several million dollars. In addition to NPC helping park group parents organize themselves to have input on the process, she suggested private fundraising lead by the community in order to have the resources to build the type of playground the park and the neighborhood should have. Meredith noted that NPC acts as the fiscal agent for many park groups, including FOLP, a number of which are playground-focused and have active fundraising going on to leverage limited City funds. When asked why there was not fundraising underway already for the playground at the park, Meredith noted that to date, FOLP have focused on park maintenance, hosting monthly work parties, landscaping efforts and the gift of new drinking fountains and that now that parents are interested in raising money for the playground, NPC is happy to help.

- Dawn noted that the first priority for bond funds is to meet basic needs in the park and that if there is a desire in the community to enhance the projects the bond can cover, spending the next year or two raising money is a great idea.
- QUESTION: If one of the planned projects will not take up all of the money allocated to it, can it be shifted to another project within the park? ANSWER: Dawn stated that cost savings usually come after designs have already been determined so it is hard to plan for that upfront. Rhoda noted that projects need to be complete in scope- replacing half of the irrigation system with new parts and leaving the other half does not work.
- STATEMENT: Much of the park's irrigation seems fine, it would be wasteful to fix something that is not broken. Rhoda noted that if something does not need to be replaced, then it will not be.
- STATEMENT: The park has lots of dog users and the designated dog play area has issues that should be fixed with this bond.
- Dawn noted that she would go back and check to see if the dog play area was part of the planned scope for the bond work and if not, that there should be further discussions about it. Rhoda noted that Upper Noe just got an upgrade of the dog play area.
- QUESTION: How will construction work? Will the park be closed? ANSWER: Rhoda noted that during construction, the contractor has the liability for the park so closing off a portion or all of the park will be decided based on liability concerns as well as the need for lay down areas to stage the construction. Construction is expected to take one year.
- QUESTION: Once all of the assessments and input has happened, how has the final authority to decide what gets done? ANSWER: Dawn stated that the Recreation and Park Commission has final approval over projects and listens carefully to public input.
- STATEMENT: the playground may be underutilized because of its condition and that many more neighborhood children would be using it if it were safer and larger.
- STATEMENT: The FOLP work very hard on the park and would love to have more people involved to take on aspects of the group's work, such as playgrounds. The example of Alta Plaza shows how success was based largely on community vision, private fundraising and collaboration.
- STATEMENT: it seems the use of herbicides is excessive in the park and inconsistent with the City's green policies. Steve noted that RPD is mandated to reduce pesticide use and is supportive of doing so.
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V. Closing Remarks

- The meeting was wrapped up with a request for more participation in the park group and the next steps t include distribution of meeting notes and establishing a playground focused portion of the park group.

VI. Contact Information

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