

COALITION MEETING MINUTES

San Francisco's Urban Forest

March 12th, 2009 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
NPC Office, 451 Hayes Street, Floor 2

I. Welcome & Introductions

Meredith Thomas, NPC Deputy Director

II. Changes to the Recreation Program at Rec and Park

Dawn Kamalanathan, RPD Planning Division Director

- The new budget environment calls for a new “way of doing business”
 - How can Rec and Park provide high quality services that respond to customer needs with staffing cuts?
- New approach:
 - The Department will lease out most if not all clubhouses, either in full or in part (individual rooms or the whole clubhouse)
 - First step: Assessment
 - Rec and Park has about 40-42 clubhouses altogether
 - Rec and Park will do an inventory of their spaces to determine how to lease them
 - Five clubhouses will go to Rec Connect (a DCYF recreation program)
 - Remaining clubhouses will have 20 hours per week of RPD staffing and another 20 hours per week available for lease
- This new approach allows for flexibility in uses and programming
 - The lessee will have to provide a “park purpose”
 - What does this mean exactly? Could it be an artist leasing the space to practice their art?
- Feedback/Audience Questions: What sort of programs should RPD attract to these clubhouses?
 - Audience Member: Will the leased programming attempt to replace the programming lost at the clubhouse?
 - Dawn Kamalanathan: RFP programming will complement RPD programs. The selection process will be citywide, but RPD plans to have surveys and community meetings conducted
 - Audience Member: Tiny Tots programs will be lost at my clubhouse. What concerns me is that the proposal discusses charging fees for services. Why should Tiny Tots participants be charged when other programs are free?
 - Dawn Kamalanathan: Good point. The Department needs a more comprehensive approach to categorizing programs and creating a fee schedule
 - Audience Member: children programs should be free, and adults should pay for their programs

- Audience Member: Could clubhouses be used for commercial purposes as long as they serve the park? For example, I am a consulting arborist.
 - Dawn: This could potentially happen.
- Audience Member: Are playfields going to be included in this proposal?
 - Dawn: Gyms and playfields will not be leased out, only clubhouses.
- Audience Member: Will lessees be nonprofit groups or for-profit groups? Can we create two proposals, one for each group?
 - Dawn: One RFP (Request for Proposal) can accommodate both groups.
 - Meredith Thomas: In Seattle, recreation centers generate money for the Department. Each neighborhood charges what the community can bear for programming.
- Audience Member: Can community members get together to provide programming? Maybe Rec and Park could lease the space to community members for \$1 per year?
 - Dawn: We are currently determining how much revenue we need to capture with the leases. This would determine how much we charge for the space.
- Audience Member: Who decided the new hours for recreation staff?
 - Dawn: Senior recreation staff determined staffing allocation.
- Audience Member: All these decisions are being made privately. There is no exploration with the community. What is RPD's mission statement now?
 - Dawn: This is a valid point. The budget situation didn't allow for the community process we wanted, but the RFP process provides an opportunity for this.
 - Meredith: Should we build into the RFP a requirement to meet with the community?
 - Audience agrees that this is a good idea.
- Audience Member: Are there any positive spins on what could be achieved with these changes?
 - Dawn: There have been demands for new services that we haven't been able to meet. This new model allows us as a Department to offer core services, and lease out space to provide new services.
- Audience Member: Do we have to retrain recreation staff again? Weren't the new hires the people with the innovative ideas?
 - Dawn: The Recreation and Park Department has realized that we can best provide the core services that have stood the test of time (basketball, soccer, etc.) with outside groups providing new programs alongside our staff.
- Audience Member: What are the qualifications to be a Recreation Director?
 - Dawn: Minimum qualifications do not require advanced degrees or specialized knowledge.
- Audience Member: Will there be subsidies in lower income neighborhoods so that we can get services that the neighborhood may not be able to afford?
 - Dawn: The system should be equitable citywide.
 - Isabel Wade (Neighborhood Parks Council): In Seattle, each recreation center has a nonprofit umbrella Community Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC picks programs and fees. That group decides which programs are subsidized and which are not.
- Audience Member: There should definitely be community input on the RFP process, and lessees should be held to the results of the community process.
- Audience Member: Some people believe that wealthier neighborhoods can afford services when really they cannot. This is akin to privatizing the system.

- Dawn: Our next steps internally include looking at each clubhouse and determining what services they can accommodate. Externally, we need to come up with a community review process and conduct outreach on an NSA (Neighborhood Service Area) basis. We then need to draft up approaches and share with the community and the commission.

III. Discussion about Urban Forestry and the Park Forestry Program

Karen Mauney-Brodek, RPD Planner; Suzanne Whelan, Friends of the Urban Forest Community Outreach Coordinator; Mei Ling Hui, Department of Environment Urban Forest Associate

- San Francisco's Urban Forest: Mei Ling Hui
 - Mei Ling provides staffing support for the Urban Forestry Council, which is an advisory council for City agencies.
 - The Urban Forestry Council reports on forestry issues, and uses this information to guide urban forestry policies (i.e. landmark tree ordinances, street tree analysis, annual forestry reports)
 - San Francisco has about 700,000 trees
 - New York City has about 21% canopy coverage, while San Francisco has 16%
 - The "Trees for Tomorrow" campaign proposes to plant 25,000 trees in 5 years. We've already planted 26,000 trees in 4 years.
 - However, more than half these trees are considered "small" (a diameter of less than 6 inches)
- The Park Forestry Program: Karen Mauney-Brodek
 - The Park Forestry Program is the portion of the 2008 Parks Bond that allocates \$4-million for tree maintenance and improvements.
 - How do we strategize the spending of this money?
 - We need to know more about our trees:
 - How many trees do we have?
 - How old are they?
 - What condition are they in?
 - New York City has an inventory of every tree in the city.
 - Bond Requirements
 - Use forest management techniques such as "hazard rating systems"
 - Areas most in need will be prioritized (i.e. sites with the greatest risk to public safety or property)
 - Best practice example: Park Presidio recently conducted a prioritization program (Presidio Forestry Assessment and Implementation)
 - Assign categories of risk, failure potential, size of defective part, target rating
 - Focus on areas with highest use (buildings, parking lots, roadways, etc.)
 - Program Approach:
 - The Department just put out an RFP to consultants to comb through tree data (compiled from ParkScan, 311 and existing assessments)
 - There will be site by site recommendations
 - Physical tree work will be performed in winter 2009 and on
 - Not everything on the list will be accomplished, but additional funds could be raised to address remaining items
 - This program could help alleviate the load on the Forestry Division, so that they can better address ongoing tree issues
 - Organizations to be consulted:

- Friends of the Urban Forest
- Neighborhood Parks Council
- Urban Forestry Council
- Parks Trust
- CA State Department of Forestry
- Bond Counsel
- PROSAC
- Audience Questions:
 - Audience Member: Can gardeners decide themselves that trees have to be addressed?
 - Karen: If the job is small enough, gardeners can do the work, but some issues require specialized knowledge
 - Audience Member: What about trees that are obviously dangerous?
 - Karen: Oftentimes these issues get addressed so quickly that they don't make it into the work order system.
 - Audience Member: Can we get urban forestry in every bond that comes out? For example, the SF General bond. Trees are part of the infrastructure.
 - Karen: Trees are assets. They improve property values and thus tax revenues, and should be included in bonds. This time, the bond is the urban forest, unlike other bonds that have tangentially addressed trees.
 - Mei Ling Hui: This program isn't just removal, right? It is also for pruning?
 - Karen: It'll be a mixture of pruning, removal and replanting.
 - Audience Member: When we take out large numbers of trees, what is the plan for that area?
 - Karen: We'll consider this site-by-site, but there is money for planting. Consideration must be given to have forests with trees of varying ages.
 - Audience Member: Will you go to all parks? Is this program based on the size of a park?
 - Karen: This program won't take us to all parks, and is not based on the size of the park, but rather on the risks posed.
 - Audience Member: Can we get more trees in the southern part of the city, particularly trees that are native and require less maintenance? We need a comprehensive plan across City departments.
 - Karen: It is mainly two departments: Recreation and Park Department and the Department of Public Works. The Urban Forestry Council works to coordinate actions across agencies.
 - Isabel Wade (Neighborhood Parks Council): We need to make sure that the community is involved in the process of identifying where to prioritize the work of this bond.
 - Audience Member: How do you take the politics out of picking which parks to work on?
 - Karen: We are bringing in a consulting professional. We also want to have a community-driven process.
 - Audience Member: The US Department of the Interior will give over 500 trees if Rec and Park will partner with community groups to plant them.
 - Audience Member: We shouldn't compare ourselves to New York City because we were not a forest to begin with. We shouldn't even bother maintaining wind-threatened trees.

- Mei Ling Hui: Trees aren't largely native to San Francisco, but neither are we. Trees can help offset our activity.
 - Audience Member: We are in the midst of a water crisis, and should plant more native trees.
 - Audience Member: There was recently a planting at Holly Park with mostly coast live oaks.
 - Mei Ling: The General Manager of Rec and Park has encouraged the planting of native species
- Our Street Trees: Suzanne Whelan
 - Friends of the Urban Forest (FUF) has community plantings every Saturday
 - Tree care days are every other Saturday
 - FUF also offers tree care workshops, as well as tree tours with guest speakers (Spring through Fall)
 - In April, there is a citizen forester training program that lasts for 6 weeks and provides hands-on training
 - FUF model starts with education and outreach
 - FUF works with trees in sidewalks, front yards, schools and community gardens
 - FUF doesn't work with trees in back yards or Rec and Park land
 - The space has to be right for native trees – small enough with room for people and cars
 - Audience Questions:
 - Audience Member: What if someone can't afford a tree?
 - Suzanne: Subsidized trees are \$195, which includes assessment for tree, removing concrete, hardware around the tree, two tree care visits
 - You can also have someone sponsor your tree, where they cover the cost.
 - Audience Member: Who actually owns the tree?
 - Suzanne: The property owner actually owns the tree and is responsible for its maintenance.
 - Audience Member: What about neighborhoods with overhead wiring issues? This is becoming a perfect storm when all these trees are growing into the wires. Why isn't the City maintaining these trees?
 - Suzanne: FUF started because the City wasn't maintaining trees. We wanted citizens to take responsibility.
 - Audience Member: There used to be a mapping project where residents could identify trees online. Does that still exist?
 - Suzanne: It was called the Urban Forest Mapping Project, and it is now on hold because of the State budget. The Department of Environment applied for money to get this going again.
 - Audience Member: What do you consider a tree?
 - Mei Ling: A large, single or multi-trunk woody plant.
 - Small mature trees grow to 25 feet. They have to be at least 15 feet tall to get clearance for people to walk underneath.
 - Audience Member: Why has the cost of tree installation escalated?
 - Suzanne: It used to be \$165, and now is \$195. We do have sponsored plantings to make them cheaper.
 - Audience Member: What happens if someone knocks over a tree with their car after its been planted?

- Suzanne: There isn't a warranty to replace a tree unless it's a stock problem, but we will credit the owner for any unredeemed maintenance visits.
- Audience Member: How do we expand existing trees if all these budgets are being cut?
 - Suzanne: I'm concerned as well because there is no long-term pot of money to take care of trees.
 - Mei Ling: There is some budget to take care of existing trees, but it's not enough. The \$104-million that trees give us back in benefits is mostly the \$95-million in property tax increases. We must take this into account.

IV. Park Group Announcements

Audience Members and Staff