



## **Mayor's Task Force on Open Space Inaugural Meeting**

Minutes

November 15, 2007

3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

UCSF Mission Bay, Conference Center

**3:00 p.m.**

### **Mayor Newsom's Welcome Remarks**

Mayor Newsom welcomed participants and noted the goal of the Task Force to help move from promise to delivery of city open spaces. Task Force will meet six times over the next year, with work groups meeting more frequently, to craft an Open Space Action Plan that may inform policy and planning. Mayor Newsom noted the need to dismantle silos and coordinate a citywide, collaborative approach to address city open space and reconcile environmental justice issues. He stressed the importance of looking to other cities as examples, but also using imagination to think beyond the success of others to do things even better in San Francisco. Mayor Newsom noted the unique opportunity to take action now given recent development in Mission Bay, Treasure Island, and Candlestick Point/Hunters Point, a new planning director, and new energy in a new term, and expressed his commitment to implementing Task Force recommendations as consensus is achieved.

**3:15 p.m.**

### **Cities and Open Space: Best Practices from Around the World**

#### **Gordon Price, Former Vancouver City Councillor; Professor, UBC**

Professor Price discussed the advantages of measuring open space benefits, especially for development, and forging win-win relationships between real estate and open space so that "growth pays for growth." He highlighted successful greenway projects in cities such as Cheonggyecheon, Seoul, Promenade Plantee, Paris, and New York, New York, which leveraged private and public partnerships to turn former freeways and train lines into parks and sequences of green experiences, to the mutual benefit of public and private interests.

Professor Price stressed the importance of establishing principles first. Vancouver, Canada, set principles and specific expectations to drive all open space development, including parks (setting a standard of 2.75 acres of open space per every thousand residents) and community centers. Such partnerships require community vision, and active participation of politicians, wealthy sponsors, and public sector actors who are backed by the community and can help negotiate terms and responsibilities. Professor Price also stressed the importance of having a long-term vision, strong dedication to stick with plans, a sense of obligation to the next generation, and designing and programming open space for utility and use, especially through the use of layers, loops and the incorporation of art and nature. Layers of use by different groups over different times of the day help keep parks safe, and help fuel citizenship and stewardship. Loops, such as connected greenway or bike paths, facilitate an integrated system of open spaces and provide residents with a mental map. Art and nature help

build memories, ensuring that future generations return. A key overall goal is to create a system of parks that's more natural, more urban and more connected.

Professor Price also highlighted Vancouver's financing mechanisms, including the use of development cost levies collected across the city per square foot of new development, and bylaws requiring developers to pay into a city open space fund before space is rezoned for high density residential. These mechanisms help the city implement the standard of 2.75 acres of park per thousand residents. The result is better stewardship of parks by the developers who fund them. Other returns on open space investment include increased pride, identity, health, democracy and assessed value.

A copy of the Park Land Acquisition Strategy for Vancouver is available on the Vancouver Park Board Website: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/info/planning/parklandacquisitionstrategy/index.htm>

**3:45 p.m.**

### **Visioning San Francisco's Greener Future**

**Isabel Wade, Executive Director, Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC)**

Director Wade outlined a vision for cities of the future, which is guided by the two pillars of open space sustainability and livability. The City faces looming sustainability challenges, including 1.7 billion dollars of capital need for park maintenance, given federal and state budget cuts and local deficits. Director Wade explained how a new park bond will help in the short term, but that a long-term plan is needed to ensure a greener, healthier future for the City. San Francisco does not currently have an open space plan. Current policies and practices do not require parks from developers (except Redevelopment areas and Commercial properties downtown), and many current high-need areas lack green space, raising environmental justice concerns. An NPC gap analysis of the existing park and recreation facility system, titled Green Envy: Achieving Equity In Open Space, confirms the need to address issues of park accessibility and open space to population density ratios. Significant development plans around the City represent an enormous, unique opportunity for investment and development of open spaces, to meet resident expectations, increase quality of life and add value. Director Wade explained that many developers understand the importance of green space, and highlighted cities such as New York, Seattle and Chicago, which serve as inspirational models of what City/development partnerships can accomplish. Chicago's Millennium Park serves as an economic engine for the city. The question remains, where will San Francisco's Millennium Park be built? The challenge for this Task Force will be to commit over the next 12 months to help the City and Mayor to achieve our many green space goals.

**4:00 p.m.**

### **Confirmation of Mission, Goal and Outcomes and Task Force Discussion**

**Gabriel Metcalf, Executive Director, SPUR**

Director Metcalf discussed the end goal of the Task Force: an open space action plan to inform budget priorities and neighborhood plans, built on a foundation of proposed recommendations to address finance and maintenance issues. Members will divide into work groups to design action around the following issues: maintenance, acquisition strategy, funding strategy, policies and planning, and leadership, responsibility and implementation. The Task Force will also review and discuss the Recreation & Open Space Element of the General Plan, as well as other related city policies on Open Space, to ensure that San Francisco has the policy framework needed to implement the Open Space Action Plan. Director Metcalf solicited the following audience member ideas on the key open space issues and challenges facing San Francisco and of importance to the Task Force as it moves forward in its work:

**4:05p.m.**

**Task Force Discussion: *What are the Key Open Space Issues and Challenges in San Francisco?***

**Facilitator: Gabriel Metcalf, Executive Director, SPUR**

**Recorder: Karin Edwards, NPC**

Open Space Task Force Discussion Question:

*What are the Key Open Space Issues and Challenges in San Francisco?*

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#### Policy Ideas, Questions, and Challenges

- The design and policy of parks should come first; planning should come second. A city should start with the development of parks, then fit buildings around those parks (Vancouver model)
- All open space planning should relate to areas of future high densities
- Can we remove buildings from one area and densify another area?
- What policies provide incentives for stewardship?
- What is our policy goal for service areas and standards for open space? Is it X acres/ 1000 people? Is it that every San Franciscan is only a 10 minute walk from a great neighborhood park? And how do we do this, especially in areas of high need?
- What is the role of local government? (Zoning, playing hardball with developers)
- Challenge: San Francisco needs a Planning Department that actually has the capacity to implement policies

#### Planning Principles and Vision

- Capitalize on transit-oriented development (TOD) in the Bay Area and require that every TOD has a park in its center
- Rise to the challenge of not only incorporating wildlife habitat preservation into planning, but also connecting the existing natural areas through wildlife corridors
- Understanding the importance of long-term planning – Any vision that the Task Force creates should be for multiple generations
- What are the priorities of this generation?
- How do we include youth in this visioning process?
- How do we leave a legacy by both acquiring new parks and maintaining the existing parks?
- Challenge: San Francisco lacks a vision that can sustain us for multiple generations

#### Waterfront

- Question: How do we get our linear waterfront park? (Vancouver model)
- Challenge: The San Francisco waterfront is owned by many different jurisdictions and many different agencies are all involved in the approval process. If we can't get a different process for neighborhood planning for open space along the waterfront, how are we ever going to draw upon the Vancouver model?

#### Eastern Neighborhoods

- We need to get very specific about locations and opportunities for parks in the Eastern Neighborhood

## Finance and Maintenance

- How can we feasibly generate enough money to really make a difference and to get the parks that everyone wants?
  - o Spread the costs out and allow the city to bond in the present! With: tax increment financing, assessment districts
- Public-Private Partnerships:
  - o How are the partnerships structured?
  - o Who will maintain them?
  - o How can they support the broadest spectrum of public uses?
  - o San Francisco has its share of good examples and bad examples
- How do we provide additional programming funding for existing parks?

## Concepts

- *Green Schoolyards*: Boston didn't have enough parks in poor areas, but these areas did have schools. In the early 2000s voters passed two bonds to create green schoolyards in 46 elementary schools. There is also an experiment going on in San Francisco – the City is beginning to explore schoolyards as great greenspaces that could also serve the community.
- *Sidewalk Parks*: makes nature more deeply embedded in city life, accessible to those that cannot travel to a destination park
- What is the *definition of open space*? Should the definition of open space be broadened to include the whole public realm?
- What is the role of *public art*? How can we facilitate the artist community enlivening our parks and public spaces?

## Connectivity and Transportation

- How do we connect parks and open space to other parks and open space, and to other public amenities in the city?
- How do we make it easier to get people to all of these places?
- Streets are not just infrastructure for movement; they are also public space
- Equity in Transportation: How do we get kids from disadvantaged neighborhoods to the parks?
- We need to have good public transportation to city-wide and destination parks. All of our parks need to be accessible by public transit

## Cautions

- Prioritization: we can't do everything
- Don't lose sight of a parks basic functions:
  - o What is missing in how parks are used?
  - o Importance of programming and activation
  - o Design to support basic uses

## Nature in the City

- Priority of this generation: saving the little natural area that we do have
- Save native plants and plant more to expand native habitat

## Other Challenges

- How do we coordinate more closely with other public purposes?

- Top three challenges with parks and equity:
  - o Transit
  - o Engaging people
  - o Safety of parks
- Addressing Gentrification: When a city builds great public spaces, it risks gentrification. However, should that stop us from creating great public spaces in those neighborhoods?
- San Francisco needs to provide a forum in which communities trust that policies and planning will provide balance between affordability and new development.

### Other Questions

- What should we be doing with our surplus of publicly-owned land?
- How do we attract tourists to our parks?
- How do we make our parks safer?

**4:50 p.m.**

### **Closing Remarks**

#### **Mike Farrah, Senior Advisor to the Mayor**

Advisor Farrah invited the audience to notify the Task Force as gaps are identified, whether in Task Force representation and membership or in general. Members were invited to sign up for one of five work groups to design action around the following issues: maintenance, acquisition strategy, funding strategy, policies and planning, and leadership, responsibility and implementation. Other work groups may be added as necessary. Advisor Farrah reiterated the end goal of the Task Force to design a set of recommendations to help direct the Mayor and Board of Supervisors in city decision making.