

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS COUNCIL****GREEN ENVY: ACHIEVING EQUITY IN OPEN SPACE*****Executive Summary***

Our City has more than 200 open spaces, playgrounds and parks. Still, many neighborhoods lack these vital assets so essential to our quality of life.

Parks are not simply desirable, they are one of the main reasons many residents and businesses choose to locate in the San Francisco Bay Area. As Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá observed, “If only children had as much public space as cars, most cities in the world would become marvelous.” Sadly, here in the City we still have far less public space for parks than we have parking spaces for cars.

San Francisco enjoys many great parks and public spaces, but we must do a better job if we are going to ensure green spaces and playgrounds for all neighborhoods. During the next half-century we need to fill the gaps in our existing park system — and plan great parks and public space for the new neighborhoods that will be developed.

Acquisition of open space in one of the world’s most expensive real estate markets is a major challenge. The high cost of property, coupled with the City’s failure to recognize maintenance of public space as a high priority, has led some to conclude that we should not acquire additional parks. Our failure to maintain existing parks should not be compounded by failing to serve those neighborhoods without these vital assets that Peñalosa argues are as “essential to the physical and emotional health of a city as the water supply.”

The Neighborhood Parks Council believes that the City has the resources needed to improve the balance of parks and facilities in the highest need areas. We also can and must develop a better process to ensure that we get the best quality parks for our future neighborhoods. To further these dual objectives, we have conducted a yearlong study of open space. In our research we:

- Reviewed the history of San Francisco’s early open space acquisition and development
- Analyzed the 30-year history of open space acquisition from 1974 to 2003
- Conducted a gap analysis of the existing park and recreation facility system using geographic information system (G.I.S.) technology and comparative category analysis
- Examined acquisition programs in other cities to glean best practices.

In our full report, *Green Envy, Achieving Equity in Open Space*, the Neighborhood Parks Council argues that what is needed to achieve equity in open space are supportive policies and multi-agency coordination, a coherent and proactive plan to

address current and future needs, and a community-guided process to implement the plan. San Francisco needs to develop low-cost acquisition methodology and inter-agency resource sharing.

We can learn a great deal by studying the best practices around the country. Most of all, however, we need to develop a vision, one that not only sees state-of-the-art green and play spaces for every neighborhood, but one that also includes another grand flagship park in the eastern corridor — or perhaps even two! Great parks don't have to be a resource only on the western side of San Francisco.

All San Franciscans deserve to have beautiful, well-maintained parks and open spaces. As Peñalosa points out: “Higher income groups always have access to nature at beach houses, lake cabins, mountain chalets, on vacations – or in urban settings at golf courses or large gardens. Parks allow the rest of society that contact as well.” Our City needs to effectively tackle this fundamental equity issue. The Neighborhood Parks Council proposes the following action plan as a starting place to move ahead toward this important goal.

### **I: Hold an Open Space Summit**

An Open Space Summit should be convened to lay the foundation for a longer-term Task Force to tackle both the problems of open space acquisition and maintenance. The program should include invited speakers from other cities and representatives from all of the San Francisco public and private agencies involved in land use decisions, real estate acquisition, park and recreation planning and services. The outcome will be ideas for a vision and agenda items for a task force to study in the preparation of an Open Space Plan.

### **II: Create an Open Space Task Force**

An Open Space Task Force, resulting from the Open Space Conference, should be convened in early 2004 in order to develop an Open Space Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The plan will create a framework, policies, criteria and priorities for open space acquisition, and a strategy to fund green space maintenance including parks, squares, street trees and center islands, and public off sets. This Task Force should complete its work within a 12- to 18-month period. Some of the work to be undertaken by the task force includes:

1. **Update the General Plan:** The Recreation and Open Space Element of the City's General Plan should be updated. Changes should be made in the General Plan itself to include Open Space Zoning and to revise language that is fundamentally biased against open space as a preferred land use. New regulations are required that developments at certain densities provide for or pay fees to establish *parks* in the immediate neighborhood. The Task Force can prepare recommendations to be presented to the Planning Department/Commission for review and adoption.
2. **Conduct a Survey:** Proposition C (2000) requires that a professional, extensive survey be conducted to assess current and future preferences for facilities, recreation programs, and open space. The Task Force should assess the

adequacy of the surveys/assessments currently being conducted by RPD and help to secure funding from the Mayor's Office of the Board of Supervisors if these products need to be expanded to meet the intent of the legislation and to best serve the public.

**3. Analyze public property for open space and recreation potential.** A coordinated study is needed to utilize or expand the DTIS (Information Services) GIS maps of public land to:

- Include ownership information for of all public land and buildings, and current uses, if any. (Coordinator: Real Estate Agency)
- A matrix matching public lands or buildings and their current uses with possible complementary uses such as recreation centers, schools, easements, rights of way, etc. Develop public benefit agreements between agencies.
- A study of possible locations for linear parks in park-poor neighborhoods using public right of ways, center islands, and wider, landscaped sidewalks as an immediate mechanism to 'green' neighborhoods while searching to find open space sites.

**III: Create a Public Property Office in the City Administrator's Office to:**

- Appoint a public property coordinator to acquire or modify for public benefit any under-used properties.
- Establish a professional property-bequest program and market it aggressively to senior citizens.
- Create a voluntary property-sales program with tax benefits to encourage owners to sell to the City in targeted neighborhoods.

**IV:** The Board of Supervisors should **develop a policy and procedural guidelines** for the use of Eminent Domain when the need of the public for amenities outweighs the need for more residential or commercial development.

**V: Review Funding Options**

The Task Force needs to consider the best funding options for both open space acquisition and maintenance of parks. With this mandate, the task force should:

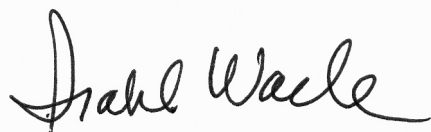
- Review the use of the Open Space Fund for operating costs and either reestablish the fund as a capital and land acquisitions fund for the Recreation and Park Department or return to the voters and secure funding for extra maintenance using such techniques as landscape assessment districts or parcel taxes.
- Consider the use of Community Development Block Grant funding for the acquisition and development of park and recreation facilities, as in other cities.
- Maximize the use of the Downtown Park Fund to establish new parks in neighborhoods downtown.
- Require developers to contribute to a Neighborhood Open Space Fund when they cannot immediately meet open space guidelines at their development that

acquires property within the immediate neighborhood, ideally filling an open space gap.

- Establish guidelines for the use of available State and Federal urban park funds to fill the gaps in high need areas as a first priority. Consider a restriction that no more than one-third of these funds that can be used for acquisition should be allocated to maintenance or renovation.
- Create a Joint Use Agreement between the Unified School District and the Recreation and Park Department that creates a Campus Park program, providing shared use of resources and facilities to create new open space at minimal cost.
- Establish a Neighbor Space Program, to provide resources for neighbors, including non-profit organizations, willing to assume maintenance responsibilities in small neighborhood parks.
- Consider novel maintenance arrangements that will lower the City's maintenance burden, including the maintenance by other public agencies and community partners.
- Prepare a study of all relevant funding options from other cities such as airport tax, dog license fee, user program fees, etc., as well as state and federal opportunities and present the best options to the Mayor & Board of Supervisors.

## **VI: Improve Accountability**

1. The Recreation and Park Commission should provide an annual written report to the public of all capital program expenditures beginning in FY 2003-2004, including in the first report an accounting of FY2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, issued through the Controller's Office.
2. The City Controller's Office should conduct an immediate audit of fees collected in lieu of open space development that have been deposited in the Downtown Park Fund, the Chinatown Open Space Fund, and the Open Space Fund. This office should provide a full report of their findings together with their recommendations for improvement in the management of these funds.
3. The General Manager should require detailed weekly/monthly work plans of all area supervisors, by site and with specific work outcomes that can be checked by them for each staff they supervise.



*Isabel Wade, Ph.D.*

*Executive Director, Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC)*

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