

New Nonprofit Parks Support Organization for San Francisco

Introduction

San Francisco' parks and green open spaces are deserving of a world-class, independent nonprofit organization which holds the vision for our parks, aligns community needs and civic engagement with accountable City government management, and supports parks improvement through philanthropic investments.

Currently, the San Francisco Parks Trust ("SFPT") and the Neighborhood Parks Council ("NPC") are the two primary nonprofit organizations which strive to meet the increasing needs of San Francisco parks and park users. The lack of adequate public funding and the corresponding decline in park conditions and amenities highlight the need for a nonprofit organization which can facilitate the collaboration between residents and the City to improve parks and raise the visibility of parks and recreation as a vital public service. Increasingly, the City is also in need of a strong, independent partner to engage in on-going planning and policy development related to public lands and to bring best practices and solutions into the public dialogue on parkland.

Within this context of increasing demand for services and scarcity of resources, a vision has been building at both SFPT and NPC to more fully meet the City-wide needs of parks and park users. This vision is to ensure that volunteerism, civic engagement, advocacy, and philanthropy are coordinated and leveraged for the best possible outcome for parks and park users. Through coalition-driven policy and action, a new organization, based on some of the best practices of both organizations and those around the country, can better ensure that the needs of parks and all park users are equitably met. This new organization can eliminate duplication of efforts and achieve economies of scale, while working efficiently and with inspiration toward an enduring vision for San Francisco parkland for generations to come.

Mission Statement

The mission of the new independent nonprofit organization will be to inspire and promote civic engagement and philanthropy to protect, sustain, and enrich San Francisco parks and green open spaces. The Organization will be dedicated to fulfill a vision of parks that acknowledges and supports their critical environmental functions while striving to ensure that they are accessible, beautiful, safe, clean, and fun and managed in a manner that makes them accountable, open, and welcoming to all.

Specific Goals

- Establish the new organization as the principal nonprofit voice for parks, recreation and green open space in San Francisco.
- Lead advocacy efforts for parklands with a focus on promoting environmental and public health benefits of parks and recreation, the community building

benefits of volunteerism, and the economic benefits of parks in every neighborhood. We will work to ensure the RPD and other City departments remain collaborative, transparent and accountable to the public.

- Maximizing private resources for parklands by building strong relationships with foundations, corporations, individual major donors and supporters, and by linking philanthropy to advocacy and the organization's programs.
- Operate programs and provide services that address the needs of all parks and park users and promote healthy use and enjoyment of parks City-wide.

Core Strategies

Strategies of maximizing resources and advocacy will be interdependent and integrated in the new Organization. The new Organization will be an independent advocate and partner in promoting its mission, providing advice, research, community feedback and funding for the agencies we work with, including the Recreation & Parks Department of the City and County of San Francisco ("RPD"), as well as the Department of Public Works, Port Commission, Redevelopment Agency, and other City departments which oversee parks and open spaces.

- Advocacy. Through community organizing, advocacy, education, and public policy research, the Organization will seek to increase the recognition among residents and public leaders of the value of parks in daily life and to ensure that our City's parks and green open spaces remain accessible and usable. It will strive to foster innovation in the design and management of the City's parklands and the provision of environmental services and recreational activities. The Organization will support community groups focused on park maintenance and improvement; advocate for the diverse needs of communities Citywide; maintain an active "Parks Policy Committee" to address alignment of City policy, planning and operations with best practices, data analysis and stakeholder input; and frequently convene community groups, City officials and other stakeholders to assist RPD and other City agencies in realizing an enduring vision for San Francisco's parks and open spaces.

The new Organization's approach to developing public policy positions will be nimble and the positions will be clear. The Board of Directors will decide positions on significant issues of City-wide importance and long-term impact, while the Executive Director will develop and implement the Organization's position on public policy issues and interactions with RPD on day-to-day matters involving park maintenance, implementation of RPD policies and practices etc. In addition, the Organization will have a Parks Policy Committee, broadly representative of the voices of leaders of neighborhood park groups, districts, and parks activists. This Committee will develop advocacy and policy directions, act as the link to the grass-roots park advocates, park groups, and general public, and will provide the Executive Director and the Board grounded opinions on policy issues and advocacy priorities.

- Resource Development. The Organization will raise funds from private and public sources to improve and maintain City parks. It expects to have a large number of dues-paying members, to foster significant donations and underwriting from local individuals and companies, and to garner support from local and national foundations. These funds are essential to bridge the gap between government funding and the growing capital and infrastructure needs of the park system.

The Organization will work with RPD and other City agencies to ensure that philanthropic goals align with community and parkland needs, and promote effective public-private partnerships. Increased philanthropic support depends both on collaboration with – as well as independence from – RPD and other City agencies, in order to assure that private funds are spent responsibly and efficiently on projects and programs most sought after by the public.

The Organization will engage donors at all levels, develop sources of earned revenue, and position itself to attract broad support. For example, fiscal sponsorship, a sustainable funding stream, is one of the key ways the Organization will advance its mission.

Conclusion

In advocating for parks, **we advocate for San Francisco** – all people, all neighborhoods, all interests, our hopes and our dreams. A singular, new, focused and independent non-profit organization, representing grass-roots issues, advocating for good planning and policy and building the financial support to act on great ideas for parks' improvements is our vision. The needs are greater than those that public funding can support alone. The efficiency, effectiveness and singular vision of the new organization will build a coalition of all San Franciscans that will focus its efforts on promoting parks and recreation as an integral part of life.

You may send in feedback or questions to welisten@sfpt.org, or, please join us on April 14th for a joint meeting for SFPT and NPC stakeholders from 6:00pm to 8:00pm at SPUR's Urban Center, 654 Mission Street, San Francisco.

