



State of Play

The Landscape of Play
in San Francisco



The Playground Initiative

The Playground Initiative is a partnership between the San Francisco Parks Alliance (SFPA) and the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (RPD) dedicated to ensuring that all children in San Francisco have access to safe and engaging play spaces in their own neighborhoods.



Introduction

This report highlights the positive work that has been done in San Francisco over the past two years to improve the quality of our city’s playgrounds, as well as the work that still remains to be done to ensure that all children in San Francisco have a safe and engaging play space near home.

Since the Parks Alliance’s publication of the 2012 Playground Report Card, a lot has happened: deteriorating playgrounds have been renovated, new playgrounds have been built in neighborhoods that previously had none, and voters weighed in that they wanted more funding for parks and playgrounds by passing the 2012 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond by an overwhelming margin.

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This report primarily focuses on the local scene in San Francisco – outlining the activities and recommendations of the Failing Playgrounds Task Force and the work of neighborhood groups who have successfully raised funds and rebuilt playgrounds. It also presents a snapshot of playground design trends nationally, and the successes and challenges of other cities in delivering quality playgrounds for their residents. The concluding section outlines the Parks Alliance’s recommendations for what should be done going forward.

Local Scene: 2012 Parks Bond and the Failing Playgrounds Task Force

Background

In November 2012, San Franciscans voted in favor of the 2012 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond, a \$195 million General Obligation Bond which included \$15.5 million to renovate, replace and fix dilapidated playgrounds throughout San Francisco. The bond language did not specify which playgrounds would receive funding.

The SF Recreation and Park Commission authorized formation of a Failing Playgrounds Task Force, as required in the Bond Report. The Parks Alliance and the SF Recreation and Park Department share a vision that the process for prioritizing playgrounds to receive Parks Bond funds should be fair and include extensive community engagement. Both organizations co-convened the Failing Playgrounds Task Force in Spring 2014 and enlisted Steve Rasmussen Cancian from Shared Spaces, a third party moderator, to serve as discussion facilitator.

The Task Force consisted of children’s advocates, parents and community park leaders, as well as representatives from public schools and open space non-profit organizations. The primary role of the Task Force was to create a list of playgrounds they deemed most worthy to receive the \$15.5 million in Park Bond funds, and to bring these recommendations to the Recreation and Park Commission. The Task Force met six times from April to September 2014 with robust public involvement.

Task Force Members:

Katie Albright, Executive Director, San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center

Julia Brashares, Director of Street Parks, San Francisco Parks Alliance

Chelsea Boilard, Director of Programs, Coleman Advocates

Alejandra Chiesa, Project Manager – Parks for People, Trust for Public Land

Rob Connolly, President, Boys & Girls Club of San Francisco

Anthony Cuadro, District 7 Representative, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC)

Dawn Kamalanathan, Director of Planning & Capital Management, SF Recreation & Park Department

Eric McDonnell, Commissioner, SF Recreation and Parks Commission

Doreen Pacini, Youth Representative, GreenAgers

Albert Ko, Executive Vice President, SF Parent Teacher Association

Michelle Parker, VP Communications, SF Parent Teacher Association

Mario Paz, Executive Director, Good Samaritan Family Resource Center

Mark Scheuer, District 8 Representative, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC)

Lee Anne Weldon, Council Member, Policy Council, San Francisco Parks Alliance



Task Force departing on playground tour

What was the Process and Outcome?

Task Force members were introduced to current frameworks for playground condition assessment (such as the Parks Alliance's Playground Report Card) during the first couple of meetings and toured various playground sites to see firsthand the difference between an A and F-graded playground.

At later meetings the group discussed various criteria that could be used to determine which playgrounds had the most need,

and possible ways to formulate their list of recommended playgrounds. After coming to agreement on which criteria they deemed most appropriate (see Methodology Used), Task Force members utilized an online tool, Tableau, to create a list of 13 playgrounds, which they approved by full consensus at their 6th meeting.

The recommendations of the Failing Playground Task Force were brought before the Recreation and Park Commission on December 18th, 2014, and were approved unanimously by the Commissioners.

RPD Capital & Planning Division staff are developing a capital delivery strategy, including a schedule and budget, that will be brought back to the Commission in Spring 2015.

Failing Playgrounds Task Force Goals:

Goal 1: Review and understand the current state of playgrounds in San Francisco.

Goal 2: Refine the criteria for prioritizing playgrounds for rehabilitation stated in the 2012 Parks Bond.

Goal 3: Create a tiered, rank ordered list of which playgrounds should receive priority for rehabilitation.

Goal 4: Host a civic forum to collect community input on what elements and experience our playgrounds should include.

Currently RPD playground renovations cost between \$1 million to \$2 million. The \$15.5 million in bond funds will cover renovations of playgrounds in Tier 1. If those renovations are less expensive – costing closer to \$1 million and/or additional private funding sources are secured – a considerable number of the playgrounds in Tier 2 could be renovated with remaining funds.

“Members of the Task Force each brought our individual background and experiences to the table and worked as a group to come to an agreement on our common goals: ridding our outdated playground equipment of chemicals and creating the kind of safe play environments that foster a renewed sense of community in our neighborhoods. I feel confident that the Task Force was able to keep public interest in mind as we arrived upon the final list of playgrounds to recommend to the Recreation and Park Commission.”

— Lee Anne Weldon, Member of the Parks Alliance's Park Policy Council, Failing Playground Task Force Member

Alamo Square
Playground



Methodology Used

The playground list was formulated by selecting playgrounds with the presence of hazardous CCA pressure-treated wood* in or around the children's play area. The list was refined by prioritizing sites with low household median income and high youth density. After these demographics, the 2012 Playground Report Card grades were used to further refine the list.

Buchanan Street Mall



Results

The 13 playgrounds prioritized for funding are geographically spread across the city, prioritizing some of the neediest neighborhoods.

*Wood that is treated with a chemical wood preservative containing chromium, copper and arsenic (CCA). When the wood degrades over time, the arsenic may leach out depending on factors such as climate, amount of CCA and the age of the wood.

Impact

When all 13 playgrounds are renovated, San Francisco will have no playgrounds with hazardous CCA-treated wood. This will be an important and long overdue milestone for the city.

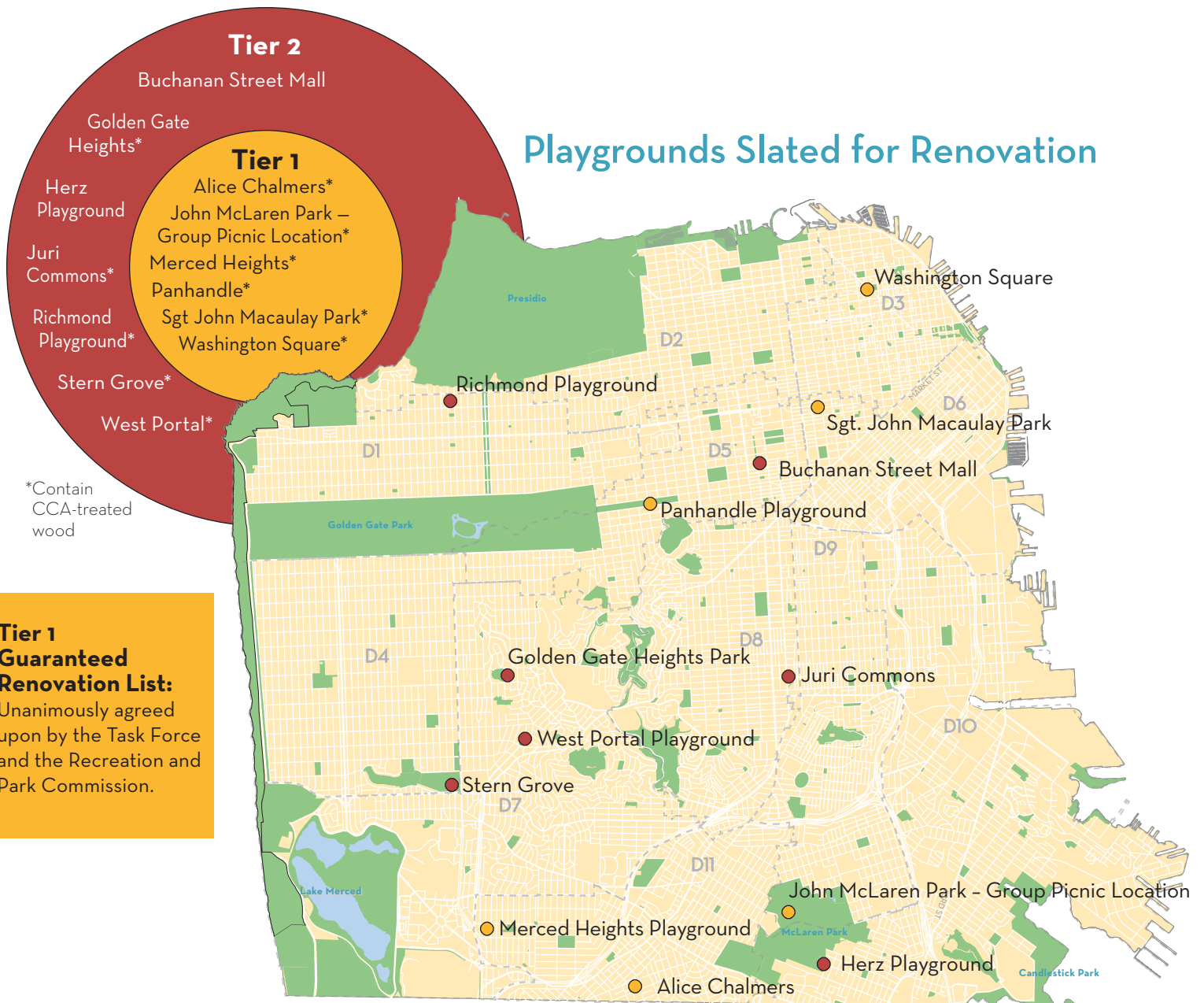
The recommendations resulting from the Failing Playgrounds Task Force's work, as well as the process the Task Force followed in making those recommendations, are consistent with the Parks Alliance's core values of civic engagement and thoughtful, data based decision-making.

For an in-depth report that includes meeting summaries and exhibits, please see the Failing Playgrounds Task Force Final Report: sfparksalliance.org/playgrounds

"I was impressed with the Failing Playgrounds Task Force members and the complexity and thoroughness of their discussion. They were asking very good and tough questions, and worked diligently with complex data. It seemed to be a complete and thoughtful process."

— Beth Rubenstein, Legislative Aide for District 11 Supervisor John Avalos

Playgrounds Slated for Renovation



Local Scene: San Francisco's World of Play

Among its 110 fiscally-sponsored Park Partner groups, the Parks Alliance sponsors 17 “Friends of” play-ground groups. These Park Partner groups have raised funds enabling the successful renovation of nine playgrounds across the city since the Parks Alliance published the 2012 Playground Report Card. These groups have spent an extraordinary number of hours rallying their communities, fundraising and leverag-ing public and corporate partnerships.

PLAYGROUNDS RENOVATED AND REOPENED	Neighborhood	Reopened	New Features
Lafayette Park Friends of Lafayette Park	Pacific Heights	June 2013	Climbing boulders from Montana; water pumps and a play stream area; several netted climbing struc-tures; serpent shaped slide; amphitheater. Designed by local landscape architect Jeffrey Miller
Cayuga Playground	Outer Mission	August 2013	Reinstallation of 300 historic wooden folk statues carved by artist and gardener Demetrio Braceres who tended the park for 24 years; ornamental gates donated by the San Francisco Arts Commission
Boeddeker Park	Tenderloin	Fall 2014	Pyramid-shaped net climber; spinner; swings and vertical chimes; two egg shaped mosaics created by a local artist, Laurel True; new clubhouse; multi-pur-pose lawn; raised planting beds for gardening; full basketball/volleyball court; fitness zone; perimeter walking path; stage.

PLAYGROUND RENOVATIONS IN PROCESS	Neighborhood	Renovation Status	Planned New Features
Mountain Lake Park The Friends of Mountain Lake Park Playground	Richmond/Presidio	Construction to begin Winter 2015	Wooden climbing maze, rope play structures, larger toddler play area, expanded lake views, improved safety.
Larsen Playground Friends of Larsen Playground	Sunset	Broke ground Fall 2014	Replica of the original F-8 Crusader jet used for years as a play structure; new play structure for toddlers; concrete slide.
South Park The South Park Improvement Association	South Park	Construction to begin Spring 2015	Increased accessibility; improved safety and updated play areas for toddlers and older children.
Joe DiMaggio The Friends of Joe DiMaggio	North Beach	Construction begins early 2015	Larger playground with more seating areas, new courts and 50 new trees.

NEW PLAYGROUNDS	Neighborhood	Opened	Playground Features
Dogpatch Playground The Dogpatch Playground Working Group	Dogpatch	August 2014	Colorful playground equipment geared towards children aged two to five, with a slide and climbing structure; benches for parents and caregivers.
Sue Bierman Waterfront Playground Friends of the Waterfront Playground	Financial District	July 2013	Pirate ship play structure; large climbing dome; playground was designed as sustainably as possible with non-toxic and recycled materials.
Emerald Park	Rincon Hill	July 2013	Interactive spinners and marbles; climbing structure; large adjacent grass area.

All playgrounds in the chart above are the products of the Parks Alliance's Park Partner groups' work, save Cayuga Playground and Emerald Park. Emerald Park is preserved as permanent open space through a conservation easement and special arrangement between the Emerald Fund and the Parks Alliance, and is open to the public at no cost to taxpayers.

Spotlight: Peru Street Playground, McLaren Park

In 2007 Chuck Farrugia and his neighbors created Help McLaren Park to revitalize the dilapidated areas of this 312-acre park in the southern portion of the city. McLaren Park, serving the Portola and Excelsior neighborhoods, had not received public money in decades, and the last major maintenance effort had not taken place since the 1980s. After much deliberation, the group selected Peru Street Playground for its first renovation project.

The group was the recipient of four major grants, totaling \$315,000, to fund the renovation. The group received a Community Challenge Grant and a Community Opportunity Fund grant, as well as large donations from different trade unions and PG&E. Community pancake breakfasts and various other grassroots fundraisers also contributed to the rebuilding effort.

After five years of fundraising and community organizing, construction began in December 2012 and the playground re-opened in October 2013. The group faced several obstacles along the way, the largest being the complications of building a playground on a slope rather than a flat site. Several key donors stepped in to assist the effort including District 11 Supervisor John Avalos' office. The new playground features a toddler play area, renovated picnic areas, trails, irrigation and a community kiosk.



Opening Day at Peru Street Playground



Photos courtesy of
Jamie Hopper,
SF Recreation & Park
Department

National Scene: Successes & Challenges

San Francisco prides itself on having world class playgrounds. Still, there is much to be learned by looking at the bigger picture. To learn from the playground scene in the rest of the country, we selected 20 cities* from the Trust for Public Lands' ParkScore® index and interviewed stakeholders from local park agencies and associated playground-focused nonprofits on the “state of play” in their areas.

*Albuquerque, Aurora, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Colorado Springs, Denver, Kansas City, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York City, Portland, Raleigh, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle, Virginia Beach, Washington DC



- **Nature play space** — A space intentionally designed or designated to integrate natural components to encourage structured and unstructured outdoor play and learning environments.
- **ParkScore® index** — The Trust for Public Land's ParkScore® index measures how well the nation's largest cities are meeting their need for parks. With the help of GIS, the ParkScore® index ranks cities commitment to parks based on three characteristics: acreage, services and investments, and access.
- **Risk play** — An approach to play that encourages children's exposure to risk in play spaces creating challenges which allow children opportunities to succeed and/or fail based on individual reasoning and choices, helping them to learn risk management and enhances cognitive growth.
- **Themed playground** — A playground constructed with a consistent motif and design characteristics.
- **Universal access** — Access made available to all children recognizing all disabilities including physical, mental, emotional, social, etc.

Most cities surveyed faced significant funding challenges which impacted their ability to maintain their playgrounds. Common issues are vandalism, and the wear and tear on playground equipment from overuse and harsh weather. City park departments struggle with innovation due to the restrictions placed by certain codes, standards, and regulations.

Despite the challenges, playground design across the United States succeeds in generating creative play structures while making space for all abilities and generations. Themed playgrounds and nature play areas are used to enhance the play experience by incorporating the surrounding environment and cultural and historic context. Many cities successfully partnered with local schools to expand access to play spaces.

Lessons Learned and Implications for San Francisco

Many cities prioritize accessibility when designing their playgrounds, not only providing entry to the play space but also featuring play equipment that can be utilized by children

Minneapolis: Nature play

4th Avenue Playground (established 2011) is located in Minneapolis' North Loop neighborhood alongside the Mississippi River and combines nature play with the logging and milling history of the area. Log slices act as steps, climbers and tunnels and a stream allows children to pump and play with water. Edible plants, such as berries are found throughout the playground. Given the lack of exposure to nature and outdoors many urban children face today, this playground encourages children to be physically active, and piques their curiosity for the natural world.

For recent research and studies by the Natural Learning Initiative addressing Nature Deficit Disorder, see: <http://www.naturalearning.org/>



Photo courtesy of Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board



Photo courtesy of harpersplayground.org

Portland: Inclusive design

When April and Cody Goldberg realized their daughter Harper, born with a disability, was unable to actually use any of the playground equipment at their local park in Portland, they decided there needed to be a change in the playground design status quo. Starting with a bake sale, they eventually raised \$1.2 million to build Harper's Playground, which opened November 2012. The playground has an open layout without any traditional playground structures. One of the Goldberg's key goals was to create a community gathering space with play as the backdrop. This is reflected in the layout and the site's group play equipment, like the multi-person donut shaped swing, the water and sand play area and the circular seating area for adults.

Berkeley: Risk play

The Adventure Playground (established 1979) at Berkeley's Marina is a unique outdoor play space where children shape the play equipment and are challenged to create their own play experience.

The structures are kid designed and resemble forts, boats, and towers. At the Adventure Playground you can ride the zipline, hammer, saw or paint. By providing these low-risk activities, Adventure Playground creates opportunities for children to learn cooperation, meet physical challenges and gain self-confidence.



with varying levels of ability. To make playgrounds in San Francisco truly accessible, we must work to incorporate equipment catering to all children, including those with physical and behavioral disabilities.

San Francisco must provide diverse play experiences in new playgrounds that are being produced — spaces that excite and entice children to be physically active, use their imaginations, and to engage with the natural world. Careful and comprehensive citywide design to create playgrounds that accommodate children of all abilities, learning modes, and feature cutting edge elements should be distributed throughout the city.

In addition to inclusive play, risk play and nature play, there are two other design considerations that stand out. Designing playgrounds with fitness in mind and multi-generational play are two ways San Francisco can create healthier communities through play. Both can often be achieved simultaneously, as many playground and fitness equipment manufacturers make outdoor equipment suited for all ages.

What's Next? Forging Ahead in San Francisco

Unique Opportunity for Philanthropy

The recent renovations and re-openings of several new playgrounds and the work of the Failing Playgrounds Task Force highlight San Francisco's commitment to providing safe and innovative play spaces for all children. However, there is still much work to be done. Of the city's over 135 playgrounds, 33 were categorized as failing in the Parks Alliance's 2014 Reassessment Report.

The \$15.5 million allocated for playground renovations from the 2012 Parks Bond guarantees that the neediest of playgrounds – ranked as top priority by the Task Force – are addressed, but more failing playgrounds remain. The recommendations of the Failing Playgrounds Task Force have presented a clear road map for philanthropy and point to needy playgrounds that must be considered next for capital investment. With this solid mandate for philanthropy and firm data backing it, San Francisco has a unique opportunity to engage funders and get these projects done. The time is right – investment directed now to playgrounds in Tier 2 (page 4) will fund worthy projects and extend 2012 Bond monies.



Miraloma Playground

In addition to the playgrounds in Tier 2, remaining high priority playgrounds for renovation and prime candidates for philanthropy include: Brooks Park, Buena Vista, Crocker Amazon (at Italy), Crocker Amazon (at La Grande), Golden Gate Park (Lincoln Ave), Golden Gate Park (Mothers Meadow), Grattan, Miraloma, Precita Park, Selby-Palou Mini Park, Silver Terrace, Visitacion Valley and Youngblood/Coleman Playground.

Playground Design Considerations

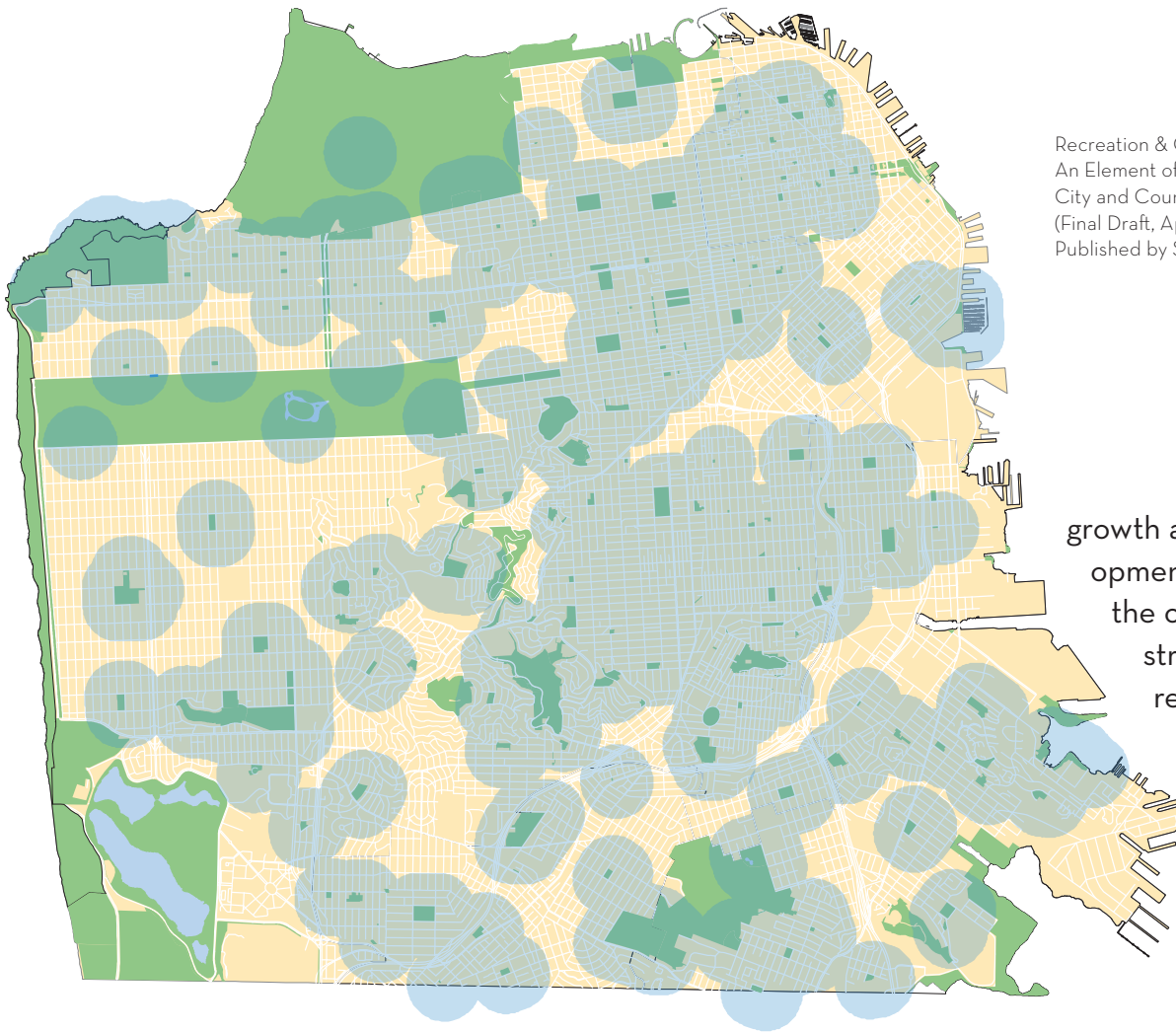
In February 2015, the SF Parks Alliance, in partnership with the Recreation and Park Department, is hosting a public Playground Design Forum to collect community input regarding what elements and experiences members of the public would like our city's playgrounds to include going forward. The Playground Design Forum will bring together members of the public, planners, playground designers, childrens' advocates and other diverse stakeholders. Data gathered at the Forum will inform future renovations, assuring that resulting playgrounds are well designed and provide rich and stimulating play environments.

Filling in Playground Gaps

As reported in the City's Recreation & Open Space Element of the General Plan (SF Planning Department, Final Draft, April 2014), many "playground gaps" remain: these are areas of the city that are outside a quarter-mile walking distance to a playground.

As noted on the map, sizable playground gaps exist along the city's south-eastern waterfront, a fact that should be taken into consideration and remedied through the planning process for the Blue Greenway (a vision to connect parks and open space in SF's southeastern neighborhoods). Given projected population

Playground map with ¼ mile walking radius and playground gaps



Recreation & Open Space Element,
An Element of the General Plan of the
City and County of San Francisco.
(Final Draft, April 2014)
Published by SF Planning Department

growth and increased development in this portion of the city, there is a demonstrated need for new recreation and play opportunities. The Sunset district is also playground deficient and could benefit greatly from capital investment for play.

Creating Additional Spaces for Play

In addition to building new play spaces, there are other creative strategies for providing access to playgrounds in areas devoid of them. The Parks Alliance will continue to work with community members and District 2 Supervisor Mark Farrell on the Shared Schoolyard Project to identify and open more schoolyards on weekends, thereby providing more play spaces to the city's children. Other opportunities for creating play spaces may be found in Street Parks, a partnership between the Parks Alliance and The Department of Public Works that enables and assists community groups in transforming DPW-owned parcels into community gardens and gathering spaces. Additionally, Pavement to Parks, a Planning Department program that seeks to turn under-utilized parts of streets and rights of way into pedestrian spaces, may present another venue for play space.

Conclusion

The San Francisco Parks Alliance is committed to improving the state of play in our city, and going forward we will continue to work to build capacity and success of our "Friends of" playground groups. We will also advocate for innovative playground design, work in partnership with the Shared Schoolyard Project to activate schoolyards beyond school hours, and continue our philanthropy efforts to address playground renovations that need to be done. Working in tandem with the Recreation and Park Department, City officials, playground advocates and stakeholders, the Parks Alliance will assure positive momentum to improve our city's play spaces continues.

Acknowledgments

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The San Francisco Parks Alliance extends thanks to RPD's Capital and Planning Division staff and members of the Failing Playgrounds Task Force for their service benefiting the city's children and youth.



Sue Bierman Waterfront Playground

Save the date!
Playground Design Forum
Feb. 28, 2015, 9:30-noon
visit [http://playgrounddesignforum.
eventbrite.com](http://playgrounddesignforum.eventbrite.com) for more info
and to RSVP