



London N. Breed, Mayor
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

Date: February 18, 2021

To: Recreation and Park Commission

Through: Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager
Toks Ajike, Director of Capital and Planning Division

From: Alexis Ward, Project Manager

Subject: Esprit Park Renovation

Agenda Wording:

Discussion and possible action to: 1) approve a conceptual design for the renovation of Esprit Park - approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31; 2) recommend that the Board of Supervisors authorize RPD to accept and expend an in-kind grant valued at approximately \$835,000 from the Dogpatch and Northwest Potrero Hill Green Benefit District (GBD) of design services for the project; and 3) recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve a grant agreement for, and authorize RPD to accept and expend, a cash grant valued at approximately \$4,165,000 from the University of California Board of Regents (UCSF) for construction of the project.

Strategic Plan

Strategy 1: Inspire Place

Objective: Strengthen the quality of existing parks and facilities

Strategy 2: Inspire Play

Objective: Strengthen and promote the safety, health, and well-being of San Francisco's youth and seniors

Background:

Esprit Park is an approximately 2-acre facility in the Dogpatch neighborhood. It features a perimeter of planting, including mature trees, surrounding a large interior lawn. The site amenities include picnic areas, benches, adult fitness stations and pathways. Located in Supervisorial District 10, the site encompasses a city block between 19th & 20th Streets and Indiana and Minnesota Streets.

Esprit Park was created as a privately-owned park in the early 1980's by the Esprit Corporation, which had its headquarters on Minnesota St. The park was conveyed to the



Recreation and Park Department in 2001 as a result of strong community advocacy. Elements of the park were renovated in 2005 including the irrigation and drainage systems and landscaping improvements. As the Dogpatch neighborhood has become increasingly residential, the population has grown along with the recreational needs in the area. Esprit Park is commonly referred to an urban oasis and it provides a much-needed green refuge.

The Planning Department conducted a community engagement process between Spring 2015 and Fall 2018 to get input on the development of the Central Waterfront Dogpatch Public Realm Plan. This process included three large community workshops, over a dozen focus group meetings, numerous presentations to neighborhood groups and surveys. The final plan outlined the design principles for the renovation, which included the following:

- Honoring the original design concept established by the Esprit Corporation;
- Designing and implementing better amenities and infrastructure;
- Refining circulation; and
- Delineating areas for different user groups, including children, the adult fitness community and off-leash dog walkers.

In 2017, UCSF formed a Dogpatch Community Task Force to identify and discuss potential impacts of UCSF's proposed development in the Dogpatch neighborhood and to determine steps to help mitigate them. The Esprit Park renovation was selected for cushioning funding by this task force composed of Dogpatch and Potrero Hill neighbors and merchants, city staff and UCSF. UCSF held a series of public meetings over eight months with the task force, and discussions led to neighbor approval of a \$10.55 million cushioning investment to address potential effects of proposed UCSF projects on the neighborhood, including \$5 million for the Esprit Park renovation. This \$5 million funding commitment, combined with \$2.7 million in Eastern Neighborhood development impact fees, provided the budget needed to proceed with planning the park renovation.

Community Process:

In 2017, Rec Park began its own community process in partnership with the Dogpatch and Northwest Potrero Hill Green Benefit District. The project team created an advisory group, the Esprit Community Advisory Group, ECAG, to aid in community outreach and to provide feedback on the design. The Advisory Group members were community members representing various community groups and residential buildings in the neighborhood. Eight ECAG meetings were held between 2018 and summer of 2020, and one park tour, on April 29, 2018. ECAG meeting dates listed below.

- May 10, 2018
- August 9, 2018
- October 25, 2018
- January 10, 2019
- March 14, 2019
- April 11, 2019
- May 22, 2019
- July 2020 (*virtual*)

Three broad community meetings were held and one additional community event, geared towards families with young children. Two online surveys were conducted during the summer of 2019 and winter 2020. The first survey, which focused on confirming the design principles in the Public Realm Plan, had more than 500 respondents. The second survey focused on the design of the park and offered six alternatives for the design and use of the park's meadow(s). The second survey had 433 respondents.

- September 17, 2017 (34 attendees), Community Meeting 1
- November 23, 2019 (33 attendees), Playdate Event
- February 1, 2020 (100 attendees) Community Meeting 2
- December 3, 2020 (80-90 attendees) (*virtual*) Community Meeting 3

Staff presented the final online survey results and the recommended concept design to the Dogpatch Neighborhood Association, the Green Benefit District and the Potrero Boosters on January 12, 2021, January 20, 2021, and January 26, 2021 respectively. Additionally, a presentation to the Friends of Esprit Park is planned for February 2, 2021.

Rec Park maintains a dedicated webpage for this project on the Rec Park website. The website includes the community meeting presentations and the final concept design. During the remainder of the project, the public will be informed through our project webpage, e-mails to stakeholders, and announcements in the Rec Park E-Newsblasts.

Throughout the outreach process, community members have been engaged and passionate about the role this park plays in the neighborhood and the importance of the renovation. While there has been consensus on many elements of the proposed design, there have also been a diversity of opinions expressed on the design and use of the meadow.

Concept Design:

During the Public Realm Plan planning process, the Planning Department, worked with the community and the landscape architecture firm, Fletcher Studio to establish the basic framework for the renovation design. Rec Park staff also participated in the process. The design framework reflects the park's original design: a central meadow with a perimeter of planting and site amenities. The design seeks to enhance and renew the park's amenities and systems while maintaining its natural and verdant character.

In collaboration with Department staff, members of the ECAG wrote the following vision statement for the park renovation:

Esprit Park is an urban oasis, connecting the neighborhood to nature within an urban environment. As Dogpatch transitions to a high-density residential neighborhood, the park is experiencing an increased level of use by all — adults, children, and dogs. The community and the Recreation and Park Department want to protect the future of this well-loved treasure. Together, we are committed to renovating the park in the spirit it was originally created — a multi-use meadow bordered by trees and shrubs. By

focusing on the park's overall health, resiliency, and robustness, the renovation will ensure Esprit Park weathers the increasing demands of the community.

Given the increased demand on the park, the design will include more resilient and robust materials. The loose concrete sand pathways will be replaced with ADA accessible concrete paths. The existing scattered picnic tables and benches will be replaced with picnic areas at the park's four corners. Berms and seat walls will be introduced to help define spaces and create more areas for sitting and picnicking. The four fitness stations will be replaced with new exercise equipment and a fifth station will be added. All the stations will be designed to better serve a range of ages. Four new nature exploration areas will be created in the park's perimeter for children to discover and play. The landscaping will be refreshed with new plants, and low wooden fencing to protect the plants.

The park's central meadow will be bisected by an east/west path, allowing for more strolling and running in the park. Specific uses will be assigned to the two meadows. In the north meadow, a new off-leash dog play area will be created. The south meadow will be designated "dog-free" and dogs on-leash or off-leash will not be permitted (service animals allowed).

One of the primary topics during the community outreach process was the material selection for the off-leash dog play area. The Department's best practices call for the use of an alternative surface material in dog play areas of a smaller size such as this one. Staff initially proposed utilizing synthetic turf for the dog play area as it would blend in aesthetically with the natural grass meadow in other areas of the open lawn. Additionally, synthetic turf can be used year-round including in inclement weather, unlike natural grass. Many community members opposed this proposal because they do not believe it is in keeping with the natural character of the park and because they believe synthetic turf has negative environmental impacts. In the final community survey, the input was evenly divided on the use of synthetic turf.

At Capital Committee, staff recommended Option W, which includes a natural grass off-leash dog play area, a result of strong feedback against synthetic turf, captured in the survey comments and in earlier outreach. However, the Capital Committee asked that staff present Option V as well as the staff recommended Option W at the full Commission. Option V consists of a dog play area that is half natural grass area and half synthetic turf. Commissioners suggested exploring Option V because of the success of synthetic turf at other Rec Park facilities, and because the Department would be able to keep a synthetic turf area open year round.

During Capital Committee, Commissioners also asked that staff present options for fencing in the dog play area. The original plan recommended by staff included modest sections of fencing, as well as berms and low seat walls to enclose the space. In general community members have been opposed to fencing as they feel it detracts from the original naturalistic, open meadow design of the park. Some community members have been opposed to fencing as they believe a fully fenced dog play area at Esprit Park could become a destination, attracting more dogs than a dog play area of this size can support.

Other community members have requested fencing to keep dogs within the dog play area for the safety of the dogs and people who do not want to encounter off-leash dogs. Staff is including some options for consideration in the attachments of the staff report.

Some community members are not satisfied with the design due to the creation of the double meadows as they believe it detracts from the original design. Additionally, others oppose the creation of a dog-free meadow and they would prefer an on-leash area. Some community members would prefer that the design did not include an off-leash dog play area. Finally, some community members have requested that fencing enclose the off-leash dog play area.

Throughout the process, the Department staff has endeavored to accommodate a wide array of community ideas and viewpoints. Staff believes that the final plan reflects a compromise that maintains the park's natural character, while accommodating the desired uses in the park including but not limited to: off-leash dog play, children's nature exploration, active and passive recreation, uses free from dogs, and enjoyment of nature.

Grant Acceptance & Agreements:

This renovation was made possible thanks to a generous \$5 million grant from UCSF, which committed \$10.55 million in cushioning investments in the Dogpatch neighborhood to address potential effects of proposed UCSF projects in the neighborhood.

Of that \$5 million grant, \$835,000 is being managed by the Dogpatch and Northwest Potrero Hill Green Benefit District (GBD) who are acting as the fiscal sponsor of the project during the design phase, including hiring the designers and engineers, arborists and other specialists needed to complete construction documents. The GBD will grant these design documents and services to the Department in-kind. Fletcher Studio, also a consultant on the Planning Department's Central Waterfront and Dogpatch Public Realm Plan, is the lead designer for the project. The Department is executing a grant agreement with the GBD for these services, which is attached as Exhibit E. Highlights of this agreement include:

- GBD shall provide RPD with extensive design and administrative services from licensed landscape architects and other consultants including participation in community outreach meetings, development of conceptual plans, development of construction documents, assistance with the bid-award process and provision of support services during the construction of the project.
- GBD shall ensure that landscape architects and other consultants comply with city insurance and indemnification requirements.
- RPD shall provide a project manager to coordinate city reviews and approvals, facilitate regularly scheduled design coordination meetings, manage community outreach, and contract with SF Public Works for preparation and administration of the construction contract.
- RPD shall maintain the park upon project closeout.

The remaining \$4,165,000 will be granted by UCSF directly to RPD as a cash grant towards construction of the project, to be managed fully by the City. We are also seeking approval from the Board of Supervisors to execute a grant agreement, attached as Exhibit F, directly with UCSF for this cash grant towards construction. A summary of the terms includes:

- UCSF shall provide a \$4,165,000 cash grant which may only be used towards construction of the project or future maintenance and operations of the park after completion.
- UCSF shall provide these funds promptly upon notification that RPD has selected a successful bidder for the project.
- RPD shall provide an update on grant expenditures on a quarterly basis from the start of construction until the project is complete; and will permit UCSF to conduct its own independent audit of project finances if it chooses.
- Recognizing its role as funder only, RPD shall indemnify UCSF against claims related to the project except under limited circumstances.

Funding Sources, Budget and Schedule:

Project Source of Funding:

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| UCSF Grant | \$4,165,000 |
| Eastern Neighborhoods Development Impact Fees | \$2,710,700 |
| UCSF Grant Managed by GBD | \$835,000 |
| Total Sources | \$7,710,700 |

The total project budget is \$7,710,700. Hard and soft costs are budgeted as follows:

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Soft Costs (32% of total budget) | \$2,510,936 |
| Hard Costs (including contingencies) (65% of total budget) | \$5,000,000 |
| Soft Cost Reserve (3% of total budget) | \$199,764 |
| Total Budget | \$7,710,700 |

| Phase | Start | End |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Planning | March 2019 | February 2021 |
| Design | March 2021 | January 2022 |
| Bid/Award | February 2022 | June 2022 |
| Construction | July 2022 | April 2023 |
| Close-Out | May 2023 | July 2023 |

Environmental Evaluation

On January 8, 2021 the project received a Categorical Exemption from environmental review pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines Sections 15304, Class 1 Existing Facilities and Class 3 New Construction (Case No. 2020-008299ENV).

Staff Recommendation:

RECOMMENDED, that the Commission 1) approve a conceptual design for the renovation of Esprit Park - approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31; 2) recommend that the Board of Supervisors

authorize RPD to accept and expend an in-kind grant valued at approximately \$835,000 from the Dogpatch and Northwest Potrero Hill Green Benefit District (GBD) of design services for the project; and 3) recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve a grant agreement for, and authorize RPD to accept and expend, a cash grant valued at approximately \$4,165,000 from the University of California Board of Regents (UCSF) for construction of the project.

The “Supporters” and “Opposition” section has been moved to Attachment D.

Attachments:

- A: Categorical Exemption
- B: Project Location Map
- C: Proposed Conceptual Design
- D: Letters from Community Members
- E: Draft Grant Agreement GBD-RPD
- F: Draft Grant Agreement UCSF-RPD
- G: Fencing Study