

BERNAL HEIGHTS PLAYGROUND RENEWAL PROJECT FAQs

PROJECT INFORMATION

Bernal Heights Playground is the first of our playground renewal projects. Playground renewal projects allow our department to deliver playgrounds in shorter timeframes than standard playground improvement projects by leveraging the City's new cooperative purchasing contracting method, made possible through legislation introduced by Mayor London Breed and passed by the Board of Supervisors in May 2024.

These playground renewal projects focus on the replacement of playground equipment, impact attenuating surfacing, and simple ancillary improvements within the existing footprint. With focused community engagement, this new process aims to shorten planning and construction timelines, reduce costs, and open new playgrounds within 12-18 months.

The final design for Bernal Heights playground grew from the input of hundreds of community members via our design survey and in-person feedback sessions earlier this year. We utilized that feedback to select playground equipment that incorporates a variety of types of play, including swinging, sliding, climbing, spinning, rocking, monkey bars, and imagination play, while also satisfying all contemporary federal and state regulations for safety and accessibility.

What is the Scope of Work of this project?

The playground renewal project at Bernal Heights Playground includes replacing all play equipment and playground surfacing, making minor grading and drainage improvements, updating the surrounding asphalt, and swapping out the sand and old tiles for fall attenuation surfacing material to ensure the playground is accessible for everyone.

Where is funding coming from?

This project will be funded by the General Fund from a dedicated program for ADA compliance and with support from the Mayor's Office on Disability.

When will construction take place?

Our goal is to have this project fully completed within less than a year. Community engagement began in January 2025. The final design was shared in April 2025. Construction is expected to take three to four months starting in summer 2025 and be completed by fall 2025.

The playground will be closed throughout construction. The blacktop will be fully accessible, as will the nearby playgrounds at Holly Park, Precita Park, and St. Mary's Playground.

DISABILITY ACCESS

What are the planned ADA improvements?

The project involves replacing sand surfacing with fully accessible turf and poured in place surfacing and improves the accessible paths of travel to and around the playground. This project will deliver all play equipment on an accessible path of travel, build an accessible entrance to the existing sand box, and incorporate inclusive play equipment. Planned inclusive play elements include features such as an accessible playhouse, sensory panels, transfer station to the existing sand box, and an accessible merry-go-round (universal spinner).

PLAYGROUND SELECTION AND PLAY EQUIPMENT

Why this playground?

Bernal Heights Playground is a neighborhood gem that is well-utilized and beloved by the community. However, it has reached the end of its useful life and is in need of renewal. A federal court found that the existing sand surfacing is not in compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and issued a court order for Rec & Park to change the inaccessible surface and fix the path of travel to the playground by late 2025.

During the planning phase, the team identified that the playground equipment would need to be replaced to meet federal and state regulations. This project is required by the court order and will bring the park into full compliance with federal and state regulations.

Will the playground have as many play elements as the existing play structure?

The new playground design has fewer play elements than the play structure it is replacing. This is because safety standards have become more rigorous over the years. These standards, especially around fall zones for elements such as slides and swings, limit the types and amount of equipment we are allowed to fit into the space.

Fortunately, by incorporating your feedback and working with our experts, this new playground will be fun and exciting, with a variety of play opportunities for youth of all ages and abilities.

Rec & Park is partnering with Kompan, a well-respected playground manufacturer, to deliver this playground. Kompan has a strong track record in San Francisco where we have installed Kompan equipment at several of the City's most popular playgrounds, including Helen Diller Playground, Lincoln Park Playground, Mission Bay Kids Park, and Sue Bierman Park. The Kompan product line uses research to improve their products in playful ways that support inclusivity and child development through play.

SURFACING

Why are you replacing the sand with synthetic turf and poured in place rubber surfacing?

The current sand surfacing is not compliant with the American Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires an accessible path of travel to all play elements. To meet accessibility requirements, the sand surfacing will be replaced with fall attenuation surfacing common at our newer playgrounds: synthetic turf and poured in place rubber.

Using sand next to poured in place or turf surfacing causes the surfacing to degrade more quickly, clogs playground drainage, and can damage play equipment. The damage to the surfacing increases the need for patching and replacement. This project will maintain sand play within the existing sandbox, improve sand play accessibility with a new transfer station, and add new sand play opportunities with a sand table.

Tell me more about the synthetic turf and poured in place rubber surfacing you will be using. Are these surfaces fully accessible? Are the materials safe for their intended use?

Poured in place rubber and synthetic turf are popular and have been commonly used at children's playgrounds nationwide for decades. RPD has used these surfacing types at our playgrounds since the late 1990s and they are now in use at most of our playgrounds across the city.

These types of surfacing are fully compliant with accessibility requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and meet requirements for fall attenuation cushioning and industry standards for

safety and quality, including those of ASTM International and the International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association (IPEMA). They are also considered safe and non-toxic for their intended use in children's play areas.

How will the City keep the poured in place and synthetic turf surfacing well-maintained?

With routine maintenance, the useful life of poured in place rubber and synthetic turf products is around 10-15 years. RPD does its best to fully replace these surfaces within their expected lifecycle, while patching problem spots as needed.

We have learned over time that standard-grade poured in place rubber and synthetic turf wears out more quickly in our high-use/high-impact areas, such as under swings and slides. This creates a situation where these areas must be patched and replaced more frequently. To help proactively address these maintenance issues, starting in 2023, RPD began using a type of poured in place rubber surfacing that has finer, more compact rubber granules in high-use areas and synthetic turf elsewhere. This promises to make our playground surfaces even more durable and require less maintenance over time.

The first playground renovation that fully incorporated this finer grain poured in place rubber and synthetic turf was [Herz Playground](#), which reopened in August 2023. We will continue to adjust our maintenance approach as we learn more and as new products come on the market.

PROJECT WEBSITE: <https://sfrecpark.org/1814/Bernal-Heights-Playground-Renewal>

PROJECT UPDATES: To sign-up for project update emails, [visit our News Flash webpage](#), scroll down to the News Flash section and then select "RPD Park Improvements: Bernal Heights Playground Renewal."

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