

MUNA's Fallen Bridge Mini-Park Activity Court Project

MUNA's mission statement:

Our goal is to provide a clean and safe neighborhood where all residents can enjoy a quality of life without fear of violence, robberies, graffiti, noise, or pollution. We want to live in a neighborhood where we know and look out for each other, where our children can play without fear of harm coming to them, where we can walk our dogs and not be witness to prostitution and other crimes.

Neighbors created MUNA, the Mariposa-Utah Street Neighborhood Organization, in early 2004 to address issues of community safety after an attack on a young woman in the neighborhood. MUNA holds meetings focused on neighborhood improvement and safety issues for its 75-plus members. It also sponsors activities for the neighborhood, with an emphasis on the area's many young families, including an annual Easter Egg hunt, semi-annual White Elephant fundraisers, and neighborhood block parties. For more information, please see the MUNA website: <http://sfmuna.org>

Background: Fallen Bridge Mini-Park

Besides improving lighting on homes, meeting with district police and other safety experts, and simply knowing our neighbors, MUNA soon realized the dangers posed by the mini-park at the base of the pedestrian bridge that connects 18th Street over the 101 highway.

The park, separated from the 101 freeway by a sound wall, is maintained by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department by agreement specified in an encroachment permit with Caltrans, the owner of the property. The encroachment permit was taken out in 1970, at which time the park was landscaped and a children's playground was added. Between 1970 and 2004 the area was not upgraded and was poorly maintained. The children's playground was removed, leaving a sand pit that was soon filled with needles and broken glass and surrounded by walls full of graffiti.

By 2004 the park also had broken retaining walls, rotting benches, and a south end surrounded by a chain link fence that seemed designed to collect garbage. Wind whipped litter into and behind the fence, and people would dump large items – broken desk chairs, old electronics, etc. – behind the fence. The park had become un-usable as a community gathering place. The lack of positive use plus the overgrown plants and untrimmed trees meant crime – particular drug dealing and prostitution – were rife in the tiny park.

Where it was easy to see blight, MUNA saw possibility. The park, by virtue of the 18th Street pedestrian bridge, connects the Mission district and the Potrero Hill district of San Francisco. Commuters on bike and on foot pass through the park everyday, and students at the nearby Downtown High School also go through the park on their way to and from school. Surely we weren't the only people who would like to see the park cleaned up.

MUNA formed a park committee with the mission both to improve the condition of the park *and* to increase use of the park by the neighborhood and surrounding community. To that end the park committee holds bi-monthly "work parties" where neighbors come together to add new plants, weed, prune, sweep, rake, water, paint, and generally clean up and take care of the park. Families and neighbors of all ages help out as they can. The committee works with the

neighborhood association on the other side of the freeway to keep the pedestrian overpass free of graffiti. What was once an eyesore and magnet for crime, is now a maintained bit of green space. Once the court is built, there will be a way for people, particularly the many children on the street and in the neighborhood, to actually use, rather than just look at and walk through, the park. People spending time in the park in a positive way will discourage the lingering vandalism and illicit activity that still occur (although at much lower levels than before the improvements) while also building a greater sense of community and creating a safer neighborhood where children can play.

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department has been very supportive of the community involvement in maintaining the park. On the bi-monthly work days, the department helps by bringing the neighbors plants and mulch and by removing the weeds and cuttings resulting from the work.

Why an Activity Court?

In 2004 the neighborhood was surveyed about the park, to find out what they liked, what they disliked and what they would like to see. With the *pro bono* help of the Miller Company, a landscape design company, the park committee came up with a design which included an activity court as well as landscaping of the southern section of the park. The design was presented to the community in 2007 at a MUNA meeting where the neighborhood voted to support the design and agreed to provide volunteer efforts to maintain the park. This court, a 17' by 62' structure, will border the sidewalk and can be used by the community for many activities.

From children's bowling to pilates to pétanque or bocce ball to t'ai chi to a simple game of catch, an activity court will provide a place for members of the community to get together. The design of the court is such that it will beautify the neighborhood and provide a visual experience that will, by virtue of its openness, be a safe environment.

Today, without the activity court, the park is not used by children. The slope of the hillside makes it difficult to find a good area for playing games. The overgrown agapanthus prevents a clear view of activities from the street. The neighborhood wants the activity court for many reasons: 1) a place for children and adults to gather and play, 2) an area landscaped for visibility to foster safety, and 3) an area landscaped for beauty by extending the stone wall and drought resistant plants motif.

Neighborhood Involvement

Beginning with a survey to determine how the neighbors felt the mini-park could be improved, the park committee was able to get *pro bono* help from the Miller Company to design solutions to address the safety issues caused by the lack of community use. In 2008 a grant was secured from the San Francisco Community Challenge Grant program to remove a chain link fence from the southern section of the park. The area was re-landscaped, as per the community-approved design, using community labor and continues to be maintained by the neighborhood. The northern section of the park still needs to be upgraded. The activity court is part of the design. In September 2011 the committee held a White Elephant fundraiser for the project. The committee intends to have another fundraiser soon.

In addition to bi-monthly workdays to maintain the newly landscaped section of the park, MUNA has joined with the neighborhood association on the other side of the pedestrian overpass

to keep the pedestrian overpass free from graffiti and to maintain the small park on the other side of the overpass. The neighborhood sees the value of working together to maintain the park for the community, given the fact that the Recreation and Park department does not have the resources to provide adequate maintenance.

Sources of Funding

The MUNA park committee is working with the SF Parks Alliance (formerly Neighborhood Parks Council and the San Francisco Parks Trust), its fiscal sponsor, in order to secure funding for the park upgrade and the activity court. SF Parks Alliance provides assistance in coordinating neighborhood projects with the appropriate agencies, in this case both Caltrans and SF Recreation and Parks.

MUNA plans to submit a grant application to the San Francisco Community Challenge Grant program for the major part of the expense of this project.

The park committee also plans to raise money holding White Elephant Sales. Our first sale netted \$1004 as well as a \$750 donation. Another sale, with an eye towards soliciting a wider pool of donations based on the success of the first sale, is planned for Spring 2012.

The committee will also approach businesses in the area for support.

Who benefits from this project?

Adding the activity court to Fallen Bridges Park will provide a well constructed area for neighbors, particularly the many children in the neighborhood, to gather and play. Children in the MUNA area must now cross a very busy street, go over or under a highway, and either up or down steep hills in order to get to a useable park. Fallen Bridges Park will be a place for them to play safely within easy walking distance, and even within sight of, their homes. MUNA chose an activity court rather than a playground, however, because of the flexibility the space offers. Children can play games (bowling or bocce ball, catch, toy cars, whiffle ball, depending on their age) but adults can also use the space for t'ai chi, yoga, or pilates. Many seniors currently use the sidewalk for such activities, showing a pent-up need for more useable green space in the neighborhood.

The activity court, with its stone retaining walls and green landscaping, will create a feeling of openness in contrast to the cut-off sense the overgrown plants give the area now. Once it is a community space, there will be more park users, which will discourage vandalism and illicit activity while building a greater sense of community. Additionally, the northern section of the park will then be in harmony with the southern section of the park.

Besides benefitting the people who live in the MUNA area, improving the Fallen Bridges Mini-Park will also improve the commuting experience of the many people who travel up or down Potrero Hill over the 18th Street pedestrian bridge, including the students of Downtown High School. Adding the activity court to the park will benefit the neighborhood and the community at large.

Project Timeline

Activity	Responsible Person/Group	Date Done
MUNA and Broadmoor Landscape Company donations acquired	MUNA, SF Parks Alliance	May 2012
Wells Fargo, Bothin, SF Beautiful and Eastern Neighborhoods Benefit Fund awarded	MUNA,SF Parks Alliance	May 2012
Community Challenge Grant Awarded	SF Parks Alliance SFCCG Program	May 2012
SFCCG Funds available	SF Parks Alliance SFCCG Program	June 2012
Meet with RPD to determine the steps needed to get on the RP Commission agenda	Steven Cismowski/RPD, Jean Bogiages/FOFB*,	June 2012
Get on the RPD Commission agenda to give the gift of improvement	Jean Bogiages/FOFB, Steven Cismowski/RPD	June 2012
Request Plant materials from RPD	Jean Bogiages, FOFB, Steven Cismowski, RPD	June 2012
Work with RPD and Landscape Architect to move from conceptual to actual design	JD Beltran, Jean Bogiages/FOFB, Miller Company	June 2012
Secure approvals from RPD, Caltrans DPW of the final landscape plan	Jean Bogiages/FOFB	June 2012
Contract with Wall contractor	Jean Bogiages/FOFB, Miller Company	July 2012
Acquire plants from RPD	JD Beltran/FOFB	July 2012
Remove existing non-permanent plants Remove non-permanent trees	Jean Bogiages/FOFB, Integrated Siteworks Inc., RPD	July 2012
Grade the area	Integrated Siteworks Inc.- , FOFB, RPD	July 2012
Construct the Activity Court	Integrated Siteworks Inc.- , FOFB, RPD	August 2012
Construct the Stone Wall	Integrated Siteworks Inc.- , FOFB, RPD	August 2012
Install the new plants and trees	Jean Bogiages/FOFB, Miller Company, SFPA	August 2012
Set schedule for monthly workdays for maintenance	Jean Bogiages/FOFB, RPD, SFPA	August 2012
Schedule Neighborhood celebration party	Jean Bogiages/FOFB	September2012

FOFB (*Friends of Fallen Bridge, the park committee*)– Isabelle Sorrell, J D Beltran, Molly Watson, Jean Bogiages, Sheldon Trimble, David Adams, Juan Jayo, Carol Fager-Higgins, Robin Talmadge, Scott Cole, Joseph Talmadge

Miller Company – Jeffrey Miller, Kyla Burson

Integrated Siteworks Inc.- Jeffrey Miller, Will Rogers

The Neighborhood has worked with SF RPD since 2004 to maintain the park



Community upgrading southern park in 2008



Park clean-up party with load of mulch



Weeds and pruning taken away by SF RPD

The Northern Section of the park still has problems



Overgrown plants invite homeless campers



Broken retaining wall built in 1970



Bench and area around it is weedy and dirty

Note Sleeping Bag



Overgrown agapanthus makes the space unusable and hides illegal uses of park