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McCoppin Square Design Gets OK from Rec. and Park

By Karen Kinney

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission unanimously approved new conceptual and design developments for the Sunset District's McCoppin Square, located at 24th Avenue and Taraval Street, on July 16, paving the way for a \$5.3 million upgrade of the eight-acre site.

Funded by the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond, the renovation now moves into the design and development stage until March 2010, when the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department will accept construction bids for three to four months. Construction is projected to begin in about a year. Once a bid is accepted and the design is finalized, the project will then go back to the Planning Commission for the awarding of a contract.

According to Meghan Tiernan, project manager of the Capital Improvement Division at the Recreation and Park Department, the purpose of the renovation is to make the park more accessible in order to provide the community with a place to gather. To do this, and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the design calls for more pathways to be built connecting the baseball field, new playgrounds and the Parkside Branch Library, which is currently under construction.

"We see the renovation as a stage for people's community activities and the proposed designs sets up a way to invite the community back into the park," Tiernan said.

Some of the proposed changes include revitalizing the landscape, renovating the baseball field by adding new bleachers and stairs, relocating the existing playground closer to the library, and building another playground in the southeast quadrant geared towards children from five to 12 year old.

Tiernan says there will be a new half basketball court and picnic tables, among other improvements, that will expand the scope of activities throughout the park.

The designs for the renovation are spearheaded by John Thomas, a landscape

architect with the SF Department of Public Works. He says after getting input from neighborhood merchants and residents, the consensus was the park was underutilized and needed a balance of accessibility with a naturalistic quality. The design has what Thomas calls a "town green" effect, which means this is not simply a repair program but instead the building of an area with connectivity that promotes pedestrian circulation, accessible pathways for the elderly and easy access to public transportation, all without disrupting the natural aesthetic quality of the park.

He said the goal is to bring more diversity of use to the park.

"Without disturbing the existing character, we want to develop areas for the community that are more vibrant for the public so people can gather and get to know their neighbors," said Thomas. "A sort of shopping mall for public services."

In an otherwise straightforward process, the only predicament of the project is, surprisingly, the bond budget does not include funds for restrooms.

According to Cammy Blackstone, legislative aid in Supervisor Carmen Chu's office, District 4 is working with a restroom task force at the Recreation and Park Department to add sufficient free-standing bathrooms.

"We are constantly advocating for McCoppin Park and surveying resources to find money for necessities like restrooms not allocated in the budget," Blackstone said. "With our economic climate, every detail can be a problem and even though we have to push for certain amenities, they (SF Rec. and Park) have been creative and careful making things work out with this budget."

The renovation of McCoppin Park is the first part of a two-part plan to improve San Francisco parks citywide.