

Make way for the children

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EXAMINER/CHRISTINA KOCI HERNANDEZ

Daniel lives in the east end of Golden Gate Park, but with plans to move to Canada, he may be out before The City moves in to renovate.

Family-only area in Golden Gate Park

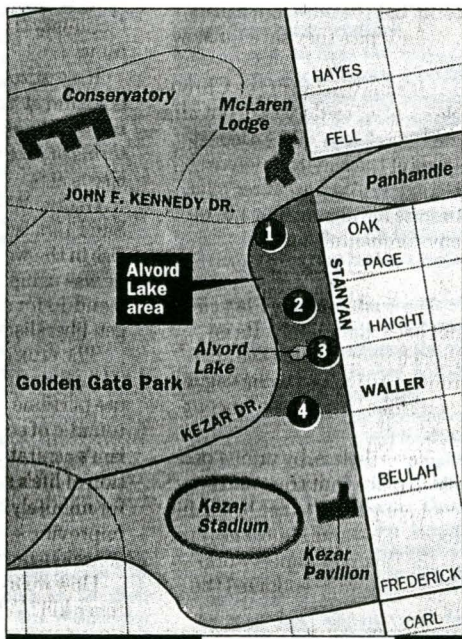
Mayor Brown has proposed several improvements to the Alvord Lake area in eastern Golden Gate Park, which would be for use almost exclusively by children and adults accompanying them.

1: Build a skating rink, with ice skating in the winter and roller and in-line skating in the other seasons. Adults without children welcome.

2: Improve the family picnic area and build a "fantasy climbing sculpture."

3: Expand Alvord Lake.

4: Build a skateboard park.



1/4 mile

EXAMINER GRAPHICS

City plans create 'place of goodness' to replace GG Park homeless haven

By Rachel Gordon
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

MAYOR BROWN wants to turn one of San Francisco's most problematic homeless hangouts into a "place of goodness."

The homeless have laid claim to the Alvord Lake area at the eastern edge of Golden Gate Park for years, bringing with them their shopping carts, backpacks and bedrolls.

Now Brown wants to turn the parkland into a family-friendly refuge, fenced off for the exclusive use of children and accompanying adults. And no homeless campers allowed.

"I'm hoping it's going to be a much healthier use of the park," said Donna Ernston, executive director of Friends of Recreation and Parks.

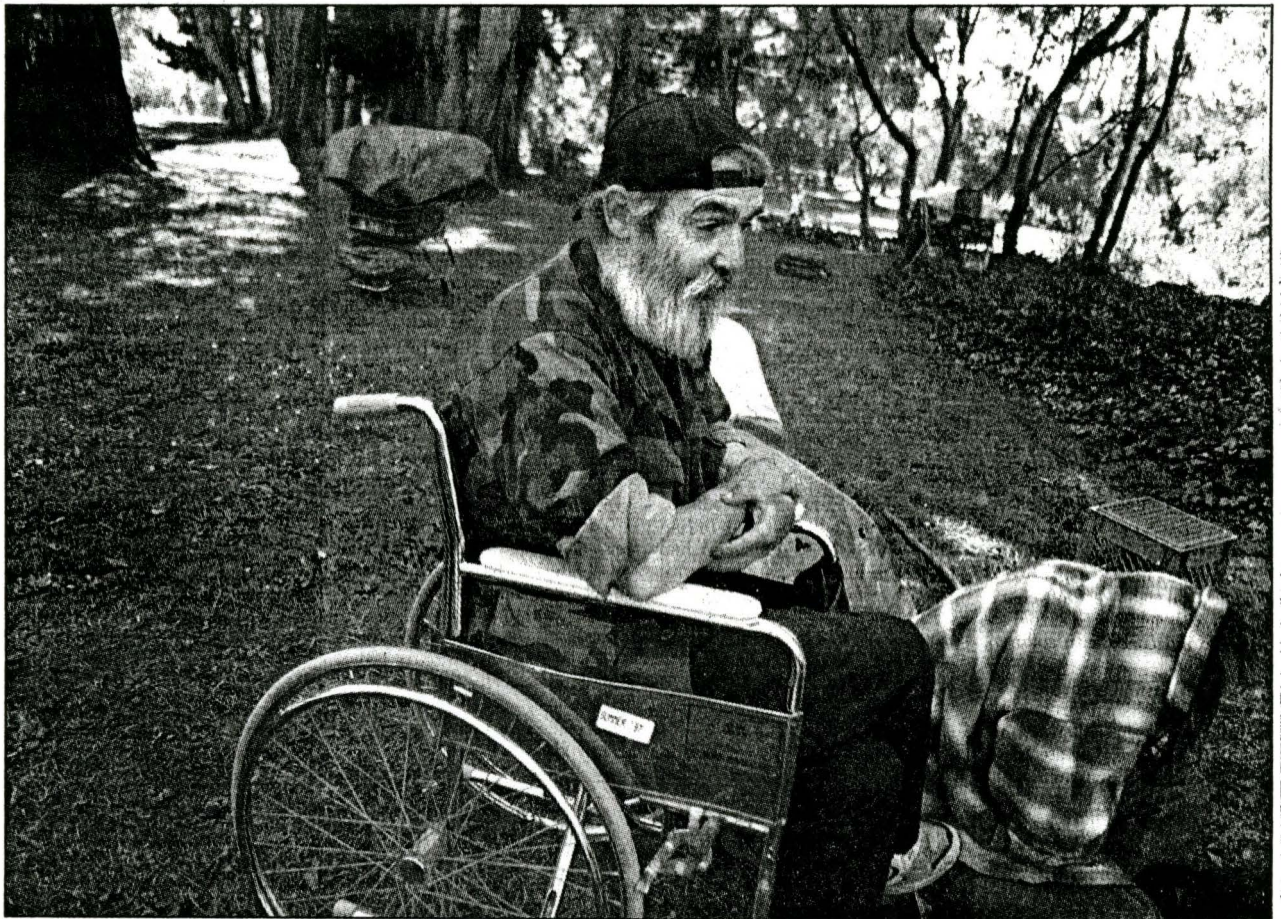
"I think it will help return that part of the park to the majority of San Francisco."

The proposal to remake the Alvord Lake area, centered at Haight and Stanyan streets, is only one component of the mayor's vision for Golden Gate Park.

[See PARK, A-18]

Mayor moves to curb development in City's neighborhoods [A-8]

Market Street merchants want to put brakes on car ban idea [B-1]



Charlie Hover, 45, who camps around Alford Lake, says Mayor Brown's proposal to clear homeless out of the area infringes on civil liberties.

EXAMINER/CHRISTINA KOCI HERNANDEZ

◆ PARK from A-1

Family spot slated at homeless haven

He also wants to move out the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum and replace it with a San Francisco history museum; pump new life — and millions of public dollars — into the California Academy of Sciences; run a free shuttle throughout the park so visitors rely less on cars; open a money-making restaurant on the east side; and revamp the Music Concourse to serve as The City's second Stern Grove for alfresco music and dance.

In addition, he wants to impose a four-hour parking limit to end the practice of commuters from Marin and the Peninsula using San Francisco's crown jewel as a parking lot.

The goal behind Brown's plan, he said Tuesday during his State of The City speech, is to make the park "a grand place to be."

Proponents of keeping the de Young in Golden Gate Park — a group that includes a virtual who's who of children's advocates in The City — aren't going to let their cause die quietly. On Wednesday they vowed to place a measure on June's ballot asking voters to block the move.

And while the battle over the de Young may be the current talk of the town, the proposed redo of the Alford Lake area packs its own civic punch.

At times, over the years, the park patch has served as ground zero for The City's homeless wars between fed-up neighbors and civil rights advocates.

"People are scared away by the

whole scene," said Bruce Lyall, president of the Haight Ashbury Improvement Association, who owns a record shop on Haight Street. "There's aggressive behavior, an unfriendly atmosphere, drugs. Not somewhere you'd want to bring your kids."

Police issue many citations

Lyall said he likes the mayor's idea of creating a family-friendly site, but said an easier way to clean up the area would be more aggressive enforcement of existing laws.

Police already have written scores of tickets this year alone for such nuisance crimes as camping illegally in the park and drinking in public. Drug dealing is also a major problem in the area.

Food Not Bombs, the anarchist, in-your-face group that serves free food to the hungry without the required city permit, makes Alford Lake one of its regular stops.

In three weeks, the Recreation and Park Department will fence off the Alford Lake section — roughly bounded by Stanyan Street, John F. Kennedy Drive, Kezar Drive and Waller Street — for a long-scheduled landscape renovation project that is expected to last six to eight months.

It may not reopen until fall 1998, when city officials hope to unveil a new families-only area where adults will not be allowed unless they're accompanied by children.

The plan is ambitious. It calls for creating a skateboard park, a picnic area, a sculpture to climb on and an amphitheater. The lake, which is now more like a pond, may be enlarged.

Just west of Alford Lake, on the other side of Kezar Drive and connected by an underground tunnel,

is the popular Children's Playground, which would get a face lift. The nearby athletic field, known as "Mothers' Meadow," also would be renovated for use by young soccer and T-ball players.

In all, 35 acres would be set aside just for children and their families. A fence — height not yet determined — would surround it.

"It will be a place of goodness," Brown said.

Attached to the proposed project is a rink that would be used for roller-skating and in-line skating in the spring, summer and fall and ice-skating in the winter. The rink, to be located where a meadow now exists across from the McLaren Lodge park headquarters at JFK and Kezar drives, would be open to all ages, even adults without kids.

Where do homeless go?

Friends of Recreation and Parks, a nonprofit organization, is taking charge of raising private funds for the \$3 million to \$3.5 million public works project.

Neither Brown nor the top brass at the Recreation and Park Department are saying that the intent of the project is to drive the homeless out of the area. But no one disputes that would be the result.

When asked where the denizens would go, Joel Robinson, acting general manager of the department, said: "To be honest with you, I really don't know."

"Don't get me wrong, I have a lot of empathy for legitimately homeless people, but it's not really the job of the Recreation and Park Department to deal with that," he added.

Carl Erickson, who at age 53 has lived in the park for the past seven years, said if The City puts a fence up around Alford Lake, he'll just

find another spot in the urban greenbelt to call home.

"I would love to live indoors, but I just can't afford it," said Erickson, who recently lost his federal Supplemental Security Income benefits. "If I can't stay here, I'll just go somewhere else."

Homeless 'have a right to be here'

His buddy, Charlie Hover, 45, called The City's plan unfair.

"I think it stinks because it infringes on the liberties of the other people, like us, who may want to use this part of the park," he said. "It's not like they can just build a fence and we'll go away. We have a right to be here, too."

The two men held court in a makeshift living room, replete with chairs and a table, in the middle of a lawn off Stanyan Street. Nearby, one of their friends raked up debris from the ground where he slept the night before.

Judy Appel, an attorney with the Coalition on Homelessness, said she's torn by the plan. On one hand, she supports the idea of creating a safe play area for children. On the other, homeless people are being displaced, with no concrete plans to help them.

Appel said erecting a fence is just the latest in a trend of using design ploys to make public places unwelcoming to the homeless. Other examples are planters set up around areas in Civic Center Plaza where people used to sleep, the narrow seats in bus shelters to keep people from stretching out on them, and metal barriers blocking off grassy knolls once favored by the homeless at United Nations Plaza.

"You can't make people go away just because you make things uncomfortable," she said.