

SPLASH PAD PARK
Oakland, California

REPORT of PARK CONDITIONS
and
RECOMMENDATIONS for PARK MAINTENANCE

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Introduction

One of the objectives of the Splash Pad Farmers Market Advisory Committee (SPFMAC) Mission Statement is to “preserve the physical condition of Splash Pad Park, suggest means to mitigate impacts of heavy use, and promote appropriate use of the park”. This report is part of an effort to help accomplish this objective.

Background

The Marin Farmers Market (MFM) has operated the weekly Grand Lake Farmers Market on Saturdays since 1998 and initially held the market in the parking lot under the 580 Freeway. Splash Pad Park was enlarged, redeveloped, and designed to serve multiple purposes, one of which is a venue for the weekly Farmers Market. The redeveloped Park was dedicated in late summer of 2003 and the Farmers Market immediately took up residence on market days. The Oakland City Council approved a Conditional and Revocable Encroachment Permit that entitles the MFM to use the park for the weekly market. As a condition of the permit the MFM is responsible for mitigating the impact of the market on the park.

In the spring of 2007 District Two City Councilmember Pat Kernighan created the SPFMAC as an advisory group and liaison between the Market, the community, and the

City. The SPFMAC meets approximately every two months. The SPFMAC has established a Maintenance Committee as an organizational tool in support of its mission.

Representatives of the City's Department of Public Works (DPW) attended committee meetings and have participated in discussions about the maintenance of the park and dealing with Market related use. In the fall of 2007 the SPFMAC issued a document titled "Immediate Action Steps Recommended by The Splash Pad / Farmer's Market Advisory Committee". The recommendations included revisions to the MFM's Ground Rules for Vendors, management practices on market days, certain maintenance requirements, and policy issues. The recommendations were organized according to responsible parties – MFM, City of Oakland Public Works, and District Two City Council Office. Several of the maintenance-related recommendations have been implemented successfully and some have not.

Objectives of this Report

This report is intended to provide a detailed review of the park's condition, to assess impact on the park by the Market, to assess the adequacy of park maintenance by the City, and to make recommendations that will improve maintenance and park conditions.

Observations

Most of the following observations were made during a site visit by Ken Katz and Jerry Barclay on October 17, 2008. Refer to the photos attached to this report for pictorial information.

1. The top of steel edging material used to separate different paving materials or planting materials has become exposed due to settlement of adjacent surfaces and/or the displacement of loose gravel paving and is a tripping hazard. This condition occurs at tree wells and between gravel and decomposed granite walking surfaces. (Problem with tree wells is that the decomposed granite was installed below the level of the asphalt creating a tripping hazard. Solution is to fill the tree wells with stabilized gravel or raise the level with stabilized DG) It also occurs at a few locations between decomposed granite and sod.
2. Gravel has been displaced and litters adjacent areas. This is both unsightly and as noted above causes uneven conditions at metal edging.
3. Some areas of decomposed granite have eroded and/or settled.
4. There are a number of poor sod conditions and sod-related problems. There are bare areas in the rye and Bermuda grasses that are the result of heavy Farmers Market vendor use. There are bare areas that are the result of heavy path of travel usage during Farmers Market days.
5. Kikiyu grass has invaded the sod in two areas (note: this was not observed on 10/17/08 but has been observed since).
6. Weeds and grass have migrated significantly into the decomposed granite paving areas, badly obscuring the designed borders, compromising the

- integrity of the decomposed granite layer, and creating a poorly maintained image.
7. There are problems associated with planting areas:
 - a. To ensure proper proper growth and plant development, the dogwoods need to be drastically pruned annually and subsequently, as needed, to maintain open sight lines into the park and to prevent these beds from providing shelter to the homeless. Currently, the beds behind the fountain and the one on the east end of the plaza are tall and dense and littered with feces and trash creating a health hazard for volunteers and the general public. The City does not typically prune the dogwoods. Volunteers have performed pruning in the past. In addition, the two small yellow dogwood beds south of the plaza are failing for reasons undetermined.
 - b. A planting bed inside the plaza seat walls planted with grasses has failed. It is now dirt and weeds.
 - c. Ground cover areas have become mostly weeds or bare soil.
 - d. The Community Garden needs mulching and more routine weeding and care.
 8. The maple trees planted in a long row parallel to the parking lot do not appear very healthy (approximately 28). In most locations the irrigation bubbler is not visible and may not be in working order.
 9. Bark on the lower trunk of trees planted within sod areas have been damaged by weed whackers.
 10. Approximately four to five additional metal trash receptacle enclosures with trash cans are needed at Lake Park benches. The city has placed cardboard receptacles at these locations.
 11. Trash accumulates within the ornamental waste receptacle enclosures that either misses the trash can or occasionally overflows.
 12. A bollard near Lake Park is badly damaged.
 13. Missing fasteners at the cover to the fountain settlement basin need to be replaced.
 14. Three lights in the fountain are missing. This appears hazardous.
 15. The fountain appeared to be working as intended. It had operational problems in the past associated with inadequate maintenance but those issues are currently resolved.
 16. A small area in the precast unit pavers has settled near the fountain. One paver is especially displaced. The condition could be a hazard to pedestrians.

Findings

The park is in fairly good condition, but there are some problems that must be corrected, many of which will get worse if not addressed appropriately.

1. The metal edge conditions, excluding those adjacent to asphalt paving, are a significant problem. An appropriate solution needs to be implemented to either remove them or restore adjacent conditions to eliminate the tripping hazard.

2. The gravel paving is not performing well and it is a continuing problem.
3. Sod maintenance is inadequate and bare areas need repair. Seasonal repairs are needed.
4. The dogwood planting areas are problematic due to routine pruning requirements and use by the homeless population.
5. Routine maintenance on the fountain – most especially routine filter replacement and chlorination- is essential to keep it working properly; avoid damage to the pump; and to prevent bacterial contamination .
6. The upkeep on the irrigation system is questionable – lack of visible bubblers at many tree locations are one indicator as is the failure of the two small dogwood beds
7. The following conditions are the result of the intense Saturday Market use:
 - a. Wear spots in the sod.
 - b. Accumulations of grime in some paving locations typically associated with Market vendors.
 - c. Substantial amount of gravel paving displacement.

Recommendations

These recommendations reflect knowledge of conditions and circumstance gained since the park was dedicated in 2003 in addition to addressing the specific Observations and Findings noted above.

1. Replace the gravel paving with decomposed granite or some appropriate permeable paving material. The gravel performs badly. It is very difficult to push baby strollers and shopping carts through the gravel, it's messy, and a maintenance problem.
2. Correct metal edge tripping hazards. Elimination of gravel paving will enable most metal edging trip hazards to either be removed or safely integrated with a new paving material. If funding restrictions preclude a change in paving additional gravel should be brought in and placed as needed to restore original levels.
3. Restore decomposed granite paving where low spots have occurred and metal edging is exposed.
4. Remove grass and weeds from decomposed granite areas and restore decomposed granite paving surface. Implement maintenance practices to prevent future migration.
5. Inspect the irrigation system to ensure proper working order and to make sure all tree bubblers are functioning. Provide more irrigation maintenance. Gardeners should operate one zone each time they visit the park and alternate the zones so that the system is getting a continuous inspection.
6. A seasonal sod repair program needs to be established for dealing with bare areas. This will require the close cooperation and planning between DPW, the MFM, and SPFMAC. An initial effort to implement a plan in the spring of 2008 was unsuccessful and needs to be revisited and implemented.
7. DPW needs to aerate, seed, and top dress all sod areas annually.

8. The kikiyu infestation needs to be eradicated as soon as possible. City policy prevents the use of herbicides to eradicate weeds. Therefore manual methods must be utilized. There may be future approved use of organic herbicides but not soon enough to deal with this immediate and urgent problem.
9. DPW lawn mowing crews must routinely clean all mowing and edging equipment before mowing the lawn/sod in order to prevent the migration of kikiyu grass and other invasive weeds from other parks. (Until the two infested areas within the park are removed, this is highly problematic. One solution would be to suspend mowing in the areas that we know are infested)
10. Pruning of the dogwoods as necessary to preserve sight lines and make planting areas less attractive to homeless individuals.
11. Periodic steam cleaning of hard paving areas, concrete seat walls, asphalt paving where needed, and trash receptacle enclosures / trash cans.
12. Use greater care or other methods of trimming the lawn next to trees.
13. Use plastic liners (bags) in trash cans.
14. Fountain maintenance must be a priority to avoid costly repairs and to ensure proper, continuous operation. Clean and flush out the sump/settler annually.
15. Provide four to five additional metal trash receptacle enclosures with trash cans at Lake Park benches.
16. Place a concrete pad under the trash receptacle at the north end of the tapering sod and pads at three receptacles located in decomposed granite areas. The pads will allow better operation of the access panels to the trash cans and prevent erosion of the granite.
17. Replace the planting area adjacent to the seat wall, where the original grasses have not survived, with a unit pavers or concrete. This area will always be vulnerable to foot traffic and the natural inclination for people to use the wall to watch Saturday musical performances. Solid paving will be welcomed by those who like to use the wall for seating.
18. Pull up area of unit pavers where they have settled, add appropriate compacted sub base (type II aggregate and/or sand) and reinstall pavers to a uniform condition.

Summary and Conclusion

Splash Pad Park is an important City and neighborhood asset. The Splash Pad Farmers Market has become an extremely popular market that is an important resource to the community and the community places a high value on it. Much has been written about the civic and economic benefits brought to communities by Farmers Markets. The Splash Pad Farmers Market is a very clear and visible example.

In order to sustain this asset for the enhancement of the community and the Farmers Market, ongoing maintenance will be required to keep it in a healthy state and to mitigate the impact of market days. To accomplish the necessary level of maintenance will require a substantial effort by all stakeholders – the City, the MFM, and the community.

It is widely understood that the City doesn't have or fails to allocate sufficient funds to properly maintain its parks. Standards for maintenance have been in decline for many years. The easiest measure of this fact is to look at the significant reduction of gardeners assigned to parks maintenance from earlier periods (back to the 1970's). The recent economic events and the City's large and well-publicized deficit will exacerbate the maintenance problem. While the City should do all that it can to maintain Splash Pad Park it is unrealistic to expect significant improvements anytime soon over the current level of maintenance.

The MFM has the responsibility via its permit to mitigate the impact of the Market's use of the park. It may be too soon to determine how effective the SPFMAC's "Immediate Action Step" recommendations may be in mitigating the most notable impact items – the condition of the sod and cleanliness of paving surfaces. Well-performed steam cleaning has shown to be very effective at removing grime. The appropriate frequency of the cleaning needs to be established as well as placing the effort into a budgetary expectation. The impact to the sod and potential means of mitigation involves many factors and details. Previous discussions have focused on proper set up and operation procedures by vendors, consistent enforcement of Ground Rules for Vendors by the MFM management, rotation of vendor layout, seasonal adjustments to the market layout, spring and fall renovations with possible "off-limits" areas, and the possible replacement of the heavily worn acute/tapered sod configurations with paving. If all of these things are done effectively the bare and worn sod areas will likely be much reduced or eliminated. It must be understood that there will be seasonal variations.

While a great deal of the gravel paving displacement is caused by the Market's use this problem appears to be an inherent flaw in the park's design and is not readily solved through any reasonable maintenance effort. Nor is it exclusively a Farmers Market impact issue. Excluding the gravel area east of the parking lot entry drive from Lake Park, there is approximately 5,065 square feet of gravel area. There is approximately 315 lineal feet of steel edging material between gravel and decomposed granite paving areas. The replacement of the gravel with another paving material, permeable or otherwise, will be costly. Until funding can be obtained gravel should be added to the areas where the tripping hazards exist to restore conditions to their original design. (I'd like to do at least a couple of the tree wells with a gravel/DG/stabilizer mix as a demonstration project. Can you plug this in somewhere?)

Community support through volunteer efforts can accomplish substantial amounts of periodic maintenance. Volunteer efforts since the park was dedicated have maintained, as was intended, the Community Garden. However, volunteers have often done far more to supplement the DPW's maintenance. This has included many activities primarily devoted to weeding and pruning. This will likely become even more necessary due to the malaise of the City's finances. In the last couple of years the original core of community volunteers has dwindled. It will be very important for the SPFMAC to actively recruit and organize a renewed, energetic, and sustainable volunteer group.

The primary problems associated with Splash Pad Park maintenance and the associated impacts of the Farmers Market are economic. It is less difficult to identify problems and their solutions than to come up with the funds needed to finance the solutions. While the MFM has in general acknowledged its responsibilities there will be inevitable financial limits. The Splash Pad Farmers Market must itself be economically sound – its vendors must make enough money to justify coming to the market and the MFM must be able to earn enough revenue to finance its management and operations. There are many farmers markets in the bay area and there is significant competition amongst them. The SPFMAC fully intends to support policies and management practices that ensure that farmers and vendors want to come to the Splash Pad Farmers Market. The MFM, SPFMAC, and the City of Oakland will need to work together to identify appropriate and necessary long term expenditures, establish who will be responsible for those expenditures, and to manage the process.

Splash Pad Park is a beautiful urban space and the Splash Pad Farmers Market has clearly been a success. There is every reason to believe that the stakeholders will work together to sustain this important community asset. Hopefully this report will serve them as an important and valuable guide for the Park's maintenance.