Harbour-8 Park: For the people, by the people

Mike Aldax | January 24, 2019

The new and yet ever-evolving Harbour-8 Park is set to undergo both short and long term enhancements. On Monday, Jan. 21, during the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service events on the Richmond Greenway, a life-size replica of the changes were on display for residents to see, use and provide input.

Within two blocks of Harbour-8 Park, there are five schools serving about 2,500 kids. That’s quite a bit more than the new, evolving park along the Richmond Greenway near Harbour Way can handle – for now.
In recent months, the nonprofit Pogo Park is gaining serious momentum on both short and long term enhancements and expansion of the park, with the aim of further transforming the once-blighted section of a former rail corridor into a center for community gathering and recreation.

The short-term plans, currently undergoing a community-input design process, involves using a $600,000 state grant to construct new entry gateways to the park, a red-brick plaza, a miniature turf playfield, and a senior area/quiet zone serving the Harbour View Senior Apartments.

In the longer-term, a vast park expansion is envisioned from the Greenway to Ohio Avenue that would not only feature enhanced park amenities, but also a café, market, bike shop, and barber shop.

As impressive as this vision, however, are the collaborations making the ambitious project possible. The Iron Triangle-based Pogo Park has partnered with the city as well as local businesses both small and large, including the Chevron Richmond Refinery, on a project that is unique in that it is truly by the people of Richmond, and for the people of Richmond.

“Everything we’re building here is built by the community,” said Pogo Park Founder Toody Maher. ”This is going to be like Pogo Park times 10.”

**Pogo Park ‘eQuipped’ for expansion**

Maher launched Pogo Park in 2007 with the mission of employing and training Iron Triangle residents to transform neglected parks in their neighborhoods into vibrant spaces for families. While learning valuable career-skills, the staff, which is primarily comprised of local residents, completed several significant projects, including the design, construction and programming of the award-winning Elm Playlot at 720 Elm Ave. The pocket park provides both state-of-the-art play structures and free, staffed enrichment activities benefiting neighborhood children.

Pogo Park’s success gained the attention of local businesses that were excited to help. Scientific Art Studio (SAS), noted for creating the giant glove at AT&T Park and the play areas at San Francisco Zoo, is one of several local shops providing space and expertise to Pogo Park staff, Maher said.

Also lending support is Chevron. In 2017, Pogo Park received a $1 million grant from the innovative Chevron eQuip Richmond Economic Revitalization Initiative to launch Pogo Park Products, a for-profit social enterprise.

The investment enabled Pogo Park’s growing line of park designs and structures to develop into a full-fledged business capable of contracting with city and county governments on park projects. Already since its launch, Pogo Park Products has secured $820,000 in contracts with the city of Richmond and Contra Costa County.

“So Pogo Park writes the grants [for park improvement projects], the grants go to the city of Richmond, and the city of Richmond contracts with Pogo Park, so the money stays in Richmond,” Maher said.

The city parks are then built for the people, and by the people.
Take part in Harbour-8 enhancements

A rendering of what the planned improvements to Harbour-8 Park in Richmond may look like.

One such example of the eQuip Richmond investment’s impact is Harbour-8 Park. In 2014, formerly abandoned, derelict blocks along the Greenway were transformed in a partnership between Pogo Park and The Trust for Public Land to include a children’s play area, community garden, bio-swale and trees.

The park has seen other enhancements since, but more significant amenities are now planned thanks to Pogo Park’s ability to partner with the city of Richmond to secure a $600,000 state grant.

During the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service events on the Greenway Monday, the Pogo Park staff gave residents a vivid view of how those funds will be used to enhance the park. They set up a life-size replica of the proposed improvements, including an actual-sized miniature playfield that is being planned for the site.
A life-size replica of the future Mini Play Field was unveiled for locals to view and use at Harbour-8 Park in Richmond on Jan. 21, 2019.

While the playfield was uneven and muddied from the rains, it will soon be graded, have a concrete foundation, artificial turf, fencing and stadium lighting. Just outside the gate to the senior housing complex, an area is set to be graded and outfitted with tables, possibly chess boards and other activities.

Community input will be key, Maher says, as Pogo Park launches into its both short and long-term plans for Harbour-8 Park.

About 18 months ago, Pogo Park partnered with The Conservation Fund to purchase a large plot of land adjacent to the park, aiming to eventually expand Harbour-8 to Ohio Avenue. Along with expanded activities for families, Pogo Park envisions businesses such as a café, bike shop, barber shop and laundromat sharing the space, with their revenues supporting park operations and maintenance.

Pogo Park’s staff of local residents want to build a family center in their neighborhood capable of serving thousands of children and their families.

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“Three studios in the Iron Triangle want to be the master trainers to train Pogo Park’s Community Team on how to do this,” Maher said. “And so it’s all built by hand, and by the people of this community.”