

January 18, 2022 | By Chris Kelly | Community Development

Building Parks and Equity in Richmond, California's Iron Triangle

Few states have done more to conserve land than California. In the last 20 years alone, California voters have approved more than \$20 billion to fund land conservation, which private and public partners have used to protect more than 1.5 million acres of land throughout the state. During that same period, The Conservation Fund, working with local, state and federal partners, has protected more than 200,000 acres in California. This important work continues with projects like Pogo Park's Harbour-8 Park in Richmond, California.

At the same time, the 2015 "Conservation Horizons Report" prepared by the California Council of Land Trusts found that these protected lands are often not located where people live and that "inequities exist with respect to access to nearby park and open spaces." In short, we needed to do more to bring parks, open space and safe places to play to where people live, particularly in urban and underserved communities.

But parks and park enhancements in underserved communities can have the unintended consequence of displacement—a process known as "green gentrification." A recent report from the UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability found that introducing or

enhancing parks can result in “increases in housing prices and the influx of new, wealthier and often white residents in low-income communities of color” leading to “the displacement of longtime residents that many park equity efforts are designed to serve.”

While conservation practitioners and academics have identified many strategies to combat green gentrification such as rent control, increased housing density, and other measures, our Parks with Purpose program is working across the country to demonstrate a different approach. We believe every community deserves access to high quality parks and greenspaces, especially those that have been impacted by historic environmental injustices. And importantly, we work to ensure these public spaces are *designed, built, managed* and *owned* by the people who live there, to ensure the greatest benefit for existing residents. Here’s how we’re doing just that at Harbour-8 Park in Richmond, California.

Existing



Proposed



The existing view (left) and proposed design for the Harbour-8 Park expansion (right), which includes a fun zone, sand and water elements, zip lines, barbeque and picnic areas, as well as a community center called Harbour Hall. Images courtesy Pogo Park.

The nonprofit Pogo Park was founded on the belief that engaging community members in visioning and developing vibrant parks will increase children’s health and safety and strengthen community resilience in Richmond’s Iron Triangle, a neighborhood long burdened by the effects of poverty, unemployment and crime. Starting in 2007, Pogo Park, led by Toody Maher, demonstrated the power of this approach by turning a once dangerous and dirty public park into the “Elm Playlot,” which the Christian Science Monitor called “one of the most innovative and jubilant public spaces in the United States.”

In 2015, Pogo Park asked us for help to expand and develop a new park along the Richmond Greenway, an old railroad right of way acquired by the City, between Harbour Way and 8th Street. Impressed and inspired by Toody's vision and track record, and eager for the opportunity to bring our real estate and conservation expertise to this important work, in 2016 we purchased 909 Ohio Avenue along the Greenway with a program-related loan from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation. Our intent was to raise funds to repay the loan, transfer the property to Pogo Park, and plan, implement and build an expansion of Harbour-8 Park that incorporated compatible commercial uses that would provide jobs, revenues and land for Pogo Park and the community.



This aerial photo shows the relationship of Harbour-8 Park to the Iron Triangle neighborhood, including 909 Ohio and a new property transferred from The Conservation Fund to the City of Richmond in January 2022. Map courtesy of Pogo Park.

In 2017, with a generous grant from U-Haul, the Pogo Park team renovated a vacant building on the property to serve as an office for the Pogo Park team and engaged the community in developing plans for the expansion of Harbour-8 Park onto the 909 Ohio

Avenue property. U-Haul's funds were instrumental in moving the park planning forward and providing good paying jobs for the Pogo Park team members.

"The Harbour-8 project benefits the entire Richmond community: the city, local residents, job seekers and neighbors who will enjoy this greenspace for years to come. Dating to our company's origins in 1945, so much U-Haul history is rooted in California and providing residential mobility for its citizens. The first U-Haul-owned store opened here. Our dealer network, which empowers local small businesses to become more profitable, originated along the West Coast. California serves as ground zero for many of our industry-leading efforts to promote ecofriendly, sustainable solutions as we build for a brighter future. Our longstanding partnership with The Conservation Fund and the dollars that U-Haul customers donate to support this important work are helping to accomplish that."

- Victor Vanegas, U-Haul Area District VP of Northern California



Park planning in the renovated office (left) and outreach along the Greenway staffed by Pogo Park (right). Photos by Pogo Park.

To implement the community's vision, in 2019 the City of Richmond and Pogo Park submitted an \$8.5 million grant proposal to California's Park Development and Community Revitalization Program. In 2020, the proposal was awarded! This was a huge signal that state government truly believed in this model.

The grant has allowed the City to acquire and expand Harbour-8 Park onto a portion of the 909 Ohio property to enhance play and community gathering spaces. Our partners a Park have retained the remainder of the property for commercial uses that will enha

the park experience, generate revenue and ensure that the local community will benefit from the neighborhood's revitalization.

In addition, the City has awarded the contract for design and construction of the Harbour-8 expansion project to Pogo Park, who will "hire, train and empower community residents to perform a significant part of the work themselves," creating up to 150 community outreach, planning and construction jobs for community residents through 2024.

"When The Conservation Fund acquired the land next to Harbour-8 Park, it expanded the park's land footprint enormously and allowed Pogo Park's Community Team to think big. It put control of the land back into the hands of the community. That is a step in the right direction, toward community power and equity."

- Toody Maher, Executive Director of Pogo Park

While the causes and responses to green gentrification and displacement are complex and varied, our work with Pogo Park and the City of Richmond at Harbour-8 further demonstrates the success of our replicable Parks with Purpose model for delivering community-driven outcomes in some of our most challenged neighborhoods. As the City said in the successful grant application, one of its paramount goals for the project is to demonstrate that by "working cooperatively together, by sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise, the Harbour-8 Expansion project can become a force multiplier and make a real impact in the health and well-being of residents living in one of California's most underserved communities."

Indeed the momentum continues; in January 2022 we transferred an additional property adjacent to 909 Ohio to the City of Richmond for further expansion of the park! We look forward to continuing to work with Pogo Park, U-Haul, community stakeholders, and importantly, with residents and neighbors to bring equitably developed parks to where they are needed most.



Written By

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Chris Kelly is known for his innovative approaches to conservation, and has contributed immensely to The Conservation Fund's efforts in his home state of California, where

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